

A summary of Acts 3:12-26

- 1. Are we ignorant of the Lord, and how can we take steps to know the Lord? (Acts 3:13-17,22-23).** Peter points out to his audience that they had denied the holy and righteous One, Jesus Christ, and even killed Him (the Prince or Author of life), and had asked for a murderer (Barabbas) to be released instead. He then acknowledges that they had acted out of ignorance (v.17). What is ignorance? Not knowing the Lord, not having the Lord's speaking, and not knowing what the Lord wants. In principle, ignorance is relative. Who can claim that he or she fully knows the Lord? Compared with many servants of God, we may be relatively ignorant. Perhaps the most frightening fact is that we may not know that we are ignorant. We may sincerely, with a good heart (no evil intention) believe that we have the Lord's speaking. For example, we may have read something in the Bible, and thought that we understood it, and then share it with other brothers and sisters. This is actually quite good. Yet is that really the Lord's speaking to us? Did we merely read something, thought we understood, and then explain it to others, or did the Lord actually touch us and speak to us in those verses? How then can we know the Lord's speaking to us? We need to ask ourselves if we care for the brothers and sisters, if we live among them, if we know them, if we care for a few, if we pray for them, both individually and corporately with other saints. Otherwise, we may end up deluding ourselves into believing that the Lord has spoken to us, and that we have received some revelation. In principle, if a few people are not on our heart, if we do not accompany them, and if we do not pursue the word of God, the Lord will not speak to us. Eventually, we may end up like the crowd, not just denying the Lord, but even "killing" Him, obviously not physically, but "killing" His function or operation inside of us. If we forsake Him, we "kill" Him because His life in us is stifled and no longer has the freedom to function in us, to reveal to us His will and how we should respond to Him. What a sobering thought. Again, we may have no evil intentions, but we may be oblivious to the fact that we are ignorant. For example, let us consider the crowd in v.11 who, on seeing the miracle of the lame man walking and leaping and praising God, ran to him and Peter and John, astounded at what they were witnessing. But this was the same crowd that had killed Jesus just a few weeks earlier. Did they have faith? They had seen the miracle. It is wonderful to see a miracle! Many people long to see miracles, and even say that they will believe if only they see one! That is commendable. God may use miracles to attract us. Again, we ask: "Did they have faith?" And we must ask ourselves: "Does our faith increase through a miracle, if we experience one? Does our faith increase if there is no miracle?" Did the crowd, when witnessing the miracle, have faith? Of course, we know that about 5000 of them believed (Acts 4:4), so they eventually did have faith, but that faith was not based on the miracle but on their repentance (3:19) and God's operation in them, which we will see in a later point. If our faith does not increase, our ignorance will remain.
- 2. Does our faith in the Lord increase? (Acts 3:12,16).** How was the lame man able to walk? Through Peter and John? Peter immediately subdues such a thought of the crowd by exclaiming, "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?" (v.12). Slightly later, in v.16, he continues, "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." Here we see two keys: the name of Jesus, and faith in this wonderful name. Indeed, the lame man saw the living testimony or witness of Peter and John, but the result was faith in Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Jesus and is saved, and whoever comes into the church life is not through our own power or godliness, though we definitely need to be witnesses of the life and name of Jesus, but rather through faith in Jesus, and this faith not of ourselves, but given to us by Jesus Himself. Indeed, the Lord needs us to labor for, or serve Him, but He is the One who decides who will be saved. He is the origin, the means and the goal of salvation. We need to frequently ask ourselves if the faith that is in us is growing month by month, and not only in us but also in the ones that we may be accompanying. We are now coming to the end of 2019. It is a good time to ask ourselves if our faith in 2019 has increased from that of 2018, and if it has not, or if it has even decreased, it is good to acknowledge that, to confess that we are ignorant. That is a great start. In a sense, we are all lame and ignorant, relatively speaking. But can we follow the Lord slightly higher and stronger? Can we take small steps? Are we content to be ignorant? Having a good heart is good, but not enough. It depends on our faith, but this faith is not faith that comes from ourselves, but is given to us by God. Everything eventually is through His mercy and grace. Nevertheless, we are responsible to grow. If our faith does not increase, we are in the same evil state of ignorance.

- 3. Do we have a repentance towards God? (Acts 3:19,26).** To repent is to turn our heart, mind and person to the Lord. Once we turn, our sins will be erased or blotted out (v.26). Sometimes, we may not feel the need to repent. We may feel that nothing is wrong. At these times, we may actually be in ignorance. For example, we may not be much in the church life. We may not accompany brothers and sisters. We may not pray with the brothers and sisters. We may be occupied with our studies or our job (both highly necessary). However, a brother or sister may speak to us to encourage us. This may be the Lord's speaking to us. If we listen, we will have much repentance: repentance, for example, for neglecting fellowship with the Lord and the saints, and paying more attention to other things, albeit necessary and crucial. The more we pray, the more we fellowship with the saints, the more we care for people, the more we pursue the Bible, the more repentance we will have. This is an interesting cycle. We may think that the more we pursue the Lord with the brothers and sisters, the less we will need to repent. On the contrary, the more we give ourselves to the Lord, the more the Lord will expose us, speak to us, admonish us and perfect us, and the more we will need to repent. David, in the Old Testament, is a good example of a brother who sinned and repented much. Yet he is referred to as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), and is mentioned 51 times in the New Testament. He wrote about 73 psalms, 7 of which are concerning his repentance (Psalm 6,32,38,51,102,130,143). Interestingly, he documented his repentance in writing, so that millions of readers of the Bible could benefit from his exercise and witness God's operation in him. What an example. He was honest to confess his shortcomings, not only to God, but even to men (us, the readers of the Bible), to expose himself, so his faith towards God could increase. When we read his psalms of repentance, we see an example of a written repentance that will never be forgotten. This example is for us. The Lord may touch us to repent to our spouse, to our roommate, to a brother or sister. What if we were to write down our repentance? Some of us may never even have had such a thought. We often think that verbal repentance is good enough. Undoubtedly, towards God, that is sufficient. Once we repent, verbally or in written form, or even in our heart, God does forgive us. But what about the person we have offended? And, perhaps even more importantly, what about ourselves? Verbal repentance, though wonderful, may not be so reliable. Did we have a turn of heart when we repented? Absolutely. Was it genuine? No doubt. Will it last? Perhaps not! Our heart changes so easily. What we say verbally may be revoked, or modified, according to our reasoning and circumstances. What we write down cannot be revoked that easily. When we write, we are accountable, not just to God and to others, but also to ourselves. When we are tempted to renege on our repentance, or "amend" it in some way, its written existence confronts us as a sober reminder of the condition of our heart at the time, and our response, and also will encourage us to experience further repentance for being tempted to alter what God had spoken to us in the first place. Written repentance, compared to oral repentance, is more powerful. Our verbal utterance can sometimes be quite light, and may even cause us to take repentance too lightly. Our written repentance may serve to lead us to "set our mind on our spirit" (Romans 8:6). How can we set our mind on our spirit, to live in the reality of our repentance? One way is to "write to the Lord." However, even our repentance or turning our heart to Him is His work and His blessing, and nothing that we can do through our own strength. Our turning to God is indeed one of the highest blessings, but this is His work.
- 4. Do we treasure the word of God? (Acts 3:21-26).** Do we pursue the word of God? The English/French speaking pursuing on skype on Thursday night is a good start to pursue the word of God, even for a few minutes. On Sunday morning, during the English/French speaking second meeting, the church fellowships concerning the verses for the week. How many of us read the verses before coming to the meeting? How many come week after week without reading the verses? This may be our habit. Can we try to break our habit and open our Bible for five or ten minutes during the week to read the suggested verses, individually or with a companion? Can we join the prayers and pursuing meeting on Thursday night? Otherwise, we may continue to remain ignorant. We may continue to say that we do not know how to pray, year after year (we do not attend the prayer meeting). We may continue to say that we do not understand the Bible, year after year (we do not pursue with the brothers and sisters). Sometimes, we prefer to be ignorant and weak. Yet God is speaking to us through His word (the Bible) and His servants who minister the divine revelation to us. Do we open our hearts to receive from God's servants? Do we treasure His servants? Do we treasure the words of life spoken by the brothers and sisters? We must treasure the reading of the word of God, not just ourselves, but also the ones whom we are accompanying and raising up. If we, and the brothers and sisters with us, have such a heart and exercise, our faith in the Lord may increase a little more.