

# GUILTY AS CHARGED

ACTS 3:11-26    SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

On March 19, 2003, Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins of the British army delivered a tremendous speech to his troops just hours before they moved out of Kuwait to begin the liberation of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> It's since become known as the Eve-Of-Battle speech, and it has been compared to the Gettysburg Address and other great orations.<sup>2</sup> It's said that a copy of it once hung in the Oval Office and English schoolchildren study it in classrooms.

Remarkably, no audio or video exists of the delivery. What's been preserved was taken down in shorthand by a lone journalist as the speech was given. Even more remarkable is the fact that this great speech was *extemporaneous*. Colonel Collins delivered it off-the-cuff. If you get a chance to read it, and I suggest you do, you'll find it to be rousing and full of gravity. Collins, speaking to a very specific audience, talks of the coming liberation effort. The duty of his soldiers to carry out their marching orders. He tells them to act decisively, yet with grace. He makes several powerful references to the Old Testament, invoking Abraham, Eden and Cain. He speaks of mercy for those who surrender and the awesome power of their regiment.

Though it's hard not to be stirred up when you read the words, it was reported that not *everyone* who heard the speech that day were excited about it. A captain in the audience reported that some of the listeners became "demoralized" when they heard it. That it "was all a little too much reality."<sup>3</sup>

The similarities between the Eve Of Battle speech and the text before us are many. After healing a crippled man, Peter and John have entered the temple complex. A crowd quickly forms, and Peter will give the 2nd recorded sermon of the Church age. It wasn't prepared or planned. It was given extemporaneously. And it was given to a very *specific* audience: The people of Israel. In this speech, Peter will talk about the gravity of their situation, God's effort to liberate and restore this world from a vicious enemy. He references the Old Testament, even invoking Abraham. And he'll point out their duty as Israelites to follow the orders of their God. This short speech has been immortalized through history, studied by young and old alike, as we are this evening. But, as with the Eve Of Battle speech, though many would be powerfully roused by it (in this case, giving their lives to Jesus Christ) not everyone in the audience will take so kindly to what they heard. The leaders of the temple will have Peter and John arrested, though many others will be saved.

We'll find that Peter's sermon is particularly *Jewish*, but that does not stop us Gentiles from applying it's powerful thrust to our own relationship with Jesus Christ.

We're putting in at verse 11, where we read:

**Acts 3:11 - <sup>11</sup> While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, greatly amazed, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade.**

The people of Jerusalem knew this crippled man. What was happening that day was an absolute shock. But, while they're astounded by the *cripple*, Peter is going to direct them to the *Christ*.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim\\_Collins\\_\(British\\_Army\\_officer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Collins_(British_Army_officer))

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forces.net/news/tri-service/battle-speech-defined-war>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*.

**Acts 3:12a - <sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he addressed the people:**

Peter shows a great *readiness* in this chapter, and that's something that shines through often in the book of Acts - that in these wonderful stories God's people were *ready* for spiritual things to happen. It's not that they knew what was coming. Peter didn't know all this was going to happen that day. But he was *ready* to minister, he was *ready* to preach about Jesus. And, later on we'll find he and John were *ready* to suffer for the Lord and to stand their ground when challenged to deny Him.

**Acts 3:12b - "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Or why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness?"**

From beginning to end, Peter's remarks will be Jewish in theme. As he opens, he calls them the men of Israel. Israel, the nation founded by God Himself. They, unlike any other group, should've known the might and plan of God. That He is a God of miracles. The fact that they were amazed and dumbstruck and, apparently, starting to whisper that Peter and John must be magical in some way, highlights just how far this group of people had drifted from where they *should* have been in relationship to God. In that way, it's a sad scene we're witnessing. These people, *in the temple of their God*, are completely flabbergasted by something that should've been completely *expected*. Peter's going to remind them of who God is. And how He had prophesied that these sort of things would happen. Jesus had been *doing* these sort of things for years and explaining how and why it was happening. But this group in the temple couldn't make sense of it. It's quite a far cry from someone like David, who could look up at the stars and, because of his intimacy with God, see in them the Lord's work *and* see in them the Lord's personal love for individual people. David looked into the night sky and thought, "Huh. God is instructing me and showing me my calling and looking after me." These Jews were seeing the literal fulfillment of prophecies that had been given to them for hundreds of years and thought, "We have no idea what's going on! What's *THIS* about?"

**Acts 3:13 - <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.**

Here, Peter begins listing out a long rap sheet of atrocities they committed against God. Even when a corrupt, pagan, cowardly governor tried to free the clearly innocent Jesus, the people forced his hand in order to have the Lord killed.

Peter uses the term "Servant" here not just as a descriptor. It's one of several Messianic titles the Old Testament prophets used. Though his audience was totally lacking in understanding, they did have a great deal of exposure to the Scriptures and so Peter was able to identify Jesus as the Savior they'd been waiting for.

**Acts 3:14 - <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you.**

Holy and Righteous One is another title for the Messiah. God's people Israel should've been able to recognize Him when He came. The Bible had made it clear where He would come from, what He would do. Jesus Himself proved He was the Messiah through His teachings and countless miracles. He claimed to be God. It was out in the open. Yet, instead of accepting Him as King, they disowned Him and requested a murderer in His place. When we think about it that way, it just seems *crazy*,

right? But this is what happened. They were choosing death instead of life. It still happens today. Men choose death instead of life. Thank God He saves us from ourselves.

Now, if you haven't noticed, Peter isn't pulling his punches. Like a good doctor, he's being frank about their fatal illness. He's listing out the many charges on their rap sheet and exposing their guilt in the hopes that they will throw themselves on the mercy of the court. This is important because, at its most essential level, Christianity is not about having a *better* life or the most commendable philosophy. At the core it is about *death* or *life*. It's about dealing with the guilt of sin and saving individuals from an eternity separated from God. And, because of that, Peter was presenting the *reality* of their guilt. And his list wasn't complete yet.

**Acts 3:15 - <sup>15</sup> You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this.**

The sermons of Acts always highlight the resurrection. It is the foundation of the Christian faith. Peter once again stands as an eye-witness of the fact that Jesus was dead but is now alive. Think of the weight that would carry in this situation: The man who *had just worked a public miracle* was saying, "It was done in the name of Jesus, who we have seen resurrected."

When God's power is actually evident in our lives, it gives credibility to our message. I don't mean that we have to go around working miracles. I mean if we're go out to the world with a message of hope, we should be hopeful people. If we're going out to talk about a God of grace and forgiveness, that power should be operating in our own lives. We're called to be *witnesses*, not *theorists*. Our lives and the transformation God is continually working in us should be proving the *reliability* of our message. Our lives are meant to *prove* the truth of what God says.

**Acts 3:16 - By faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Him has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.**

It's interesting: The crowd had gathered because of a miracle that happened. *Proof* of that miracle was currently clinging onto Peter. But he really spends very little time referencing it. Instead, Peter demands, throughout his speech, that they focus their thoughts on *Jesus Christ* and the truth of the Scripture. On the issues of sin and repentance and resurrection and faith.

Sometimes Christians become fixated on *experiential* spirituality. Their spiritual lives become a constant pursuit of manifestations of one kind or another. The Christians in Acts didn't chase manifestations or feelings. They pursued the *Lord* and His truth. And, in the mean time, God was doing very real and very wonderful things in their midst. *We of course* want God to be working in dramatic ways in and around our lives. And He wants to do that too. Our part is to focus on *Christ*, His word, His truth, and to live obediently. To be full of faith does not mean to chase after certain spiritual emotions, but to trust the Lord and be in step with what He wants to be doing in our lives.

We notice, also, that it was not *worthiness* that won this man healing that day. It wasn't effort. It wasn't entitlement or merit. We thought a little about this last week. We can't know the mind of God and why this man on *this* day was granted a miraculous healing, but it wasn't because the man had somehow earned it. I say that to encourage all of us who are praying for loved ones who are suffering. This man had waited more than 40 years to be healed. God still heals. We should still pray for it. In the mean time, we shouldn't think that God withholds healing because we're unworthy in His

eyes. Rather, we can fortify ourselves with the knowledge that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

**Acts 3:17 - <sup>17</sup> “And now, brothers, I know that you did it in ignorance, just as your leaders also did.**

Now, this is a remarkable verse, especially after reading that long list of severe accusations. Peter first identifies with them, calling them brothers. And then he, with the Holy Spirit, extends them incredible grace, saying “You didn't realize what you were doing.” Not just the people in general, but the leadership also. From reading the Gospels, it sure *seemed* like they knew what they were doing. But God's grace sees it another way. Sadly, these same leaders are not going to return grace back.

**Acts 3:18 - <sup>18</sup> But what God predicted through the mouth of all the prophets—that His Messiah would suffer—He has fulfilled in this way.**

Peter loved to talk prophecy. He took it literally and seriously. And, as he did in his *first* sermon, he's going to not only highlight prophecies that were literally fulfilled in Christ's *first* coming, he's then going to talk about the yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies that concern the Lord's *second* coming.

**Acts 3:19 - <sup>19</sup> Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,**

The call to action was the same as the first sermon and would be the same all the way through to Christ's letters to the 7 churches in Revelation: Repent! If we want to be right with God, if want seasons of refreshing, another word for it is revival, our part is simple: We need to repent. Repentance is not simply saluting God or “voting” for Him. It means to faithfully agree and go His way. Remember: God wants to be *followed*. To repent means we go *with* Him, forsaking all other paths.

**Acts 3:20-21 - <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah. <sup>21</sup> Heaven must welcome Him until the times of the restoration of all things, which God spoke about by the mouth of His holy prophets from the beginning.**

There's a hint here of what Peter would suggest in his second epistle: That we can actively participate in hastening the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. And it is Christ's return that will ultimately solve all the problems that need solving in this world. Human efforts are dismal, makeshift attempts to fix what can only be truly mended by the Redeemer.

Now, remember that Peter is speaking specifically to a *Jewish* audience about the *Jewish* people at large. God's plan is not just for individuals to be saved, but for Israel, as a nation, as well. That's a significant aspect of the Great Tribulation. Though they rejected Jesus and refused this offer from Peter, one day all Israel *will* be saved. God has not forgotten His special people.

Before we move on, one more thought that I found encouraging: We sometimes talk about the love of God and say He loved us so much He was willing to leave heaven to save us. And that's true. But here we're reminded that He loves us so much He's going to leave heaven *again*. Christ will return once more and spend 1,000 years on the earth making right what we've done wrong. How great is His love for us!

**Acts 3:22-23 - <sup>22</sup> Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to Him in everything He will say to you. <sup>23</sup> And everyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from the people.**

The Jews, reading their Scriptures, had come to the conclusion that there were 2 figures they were waiting for: The Messiah and a second figure, this Prophet from Deuteronomy 18. In fact, this belief is highlighted a few times in the Gospels. However, here Peter explains that they are one in the same: Jesus is the Prophet and the Messiah.

Interestingly, *in* the Tribulation, when Satan sends his counterfeit to deceive Israel, he sends two figures: The AntiChrist and a False Prophet. These, Israel *will* accept for a time.

Twice Peter references their need to *listen* to the Lord Jesus. Do we listen to Him today? Comedian Jim Gaffigan hilariously points out how little we listen to doctors. They tell us things about how to stay healthy and alive and we pay almost no attention to it. “You need to exercise 30 minutes a day.” Not gonna do that. “Sitting for too long each day is dangerous to your health.” “Avoid electronics before bed.” They tell us, but we don’t *listen*. But what about our Lord? Are we *listening* to what He’s said? About our mindset? About our decisions? About what He commands? Moses would say to us tonight: “You must listen to Him in *everything* He will say to you.”

**Acts 3:24 - <sup>24</sup> “In addition, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also announced these days.**

While we can’t always anticipate God’s timing or specific methods, He’s been quite up front about His plan for the world. Peter was convinced you could go to the Scriptures, especially prophecy, and make sense of what was going on in the world. We should do the same thing so we can avoid making the same types of mistakes that Israel had made.

**Acts 3:25-26 - <sup>25</sup> You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors, saying to Abraham, And all the families of the earth will be blessed through your offspring. <sup>26</sup> God raised up His Servant and sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.”**

These people of Israel had the heritage and the prophecy and much more which should’ve been a great spiritual advantage to them. And as Peter closes, he reminds them of their national *calling*. They were supposed to be God’s instrument of blessing to the world. Instead, they had gone their own way and now, God was trying (yet again) to turn them back and save them. Peter’s wording reminds us that to be turned from sin is not only a necessary thing, it’s a *blessing*. Not only does God want to pull people out of the crushing rubble of sin, He wants to bless them by freeing them and giving new life and providing real satisfaction and purpose and peace.

It was a Jewish sermon, but there’s still plenty of power here to stir us up on the eve of whatever battle that might lay ahead. First, we want to follow the example of the disciples and be Christians who are *ready*. Ready to be used by God. Ready to tell the truth of His word to people. It’s all too easy for us to simply let life happen to us. But Peter and Paul would both later write about living in such a way that you’re ready to serve God and be a conduit for His power.

Second, we want to be true witnesses whose testimony is credible because of the actual power of God in us. [Gladys Aylward prison riot story]

Finally, are we *listening* to Jesus Christ? Not in part but in whole? He is the source of life. He loves us. He is coming back. He speaks through His word. He has revealed much and blessed us with a wonderful heritage, rich supply. Anyone who listens to Him and follows is wise, like a person who builds their house on solid rock. People who God can command to do great things in His ongoing liberation of this needy world.