

Homiletics Analysis: Acts 3:1-26

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Acts 3 narrates the healing of a man lame from birth at the gate called Beautiful, followed immediately by Peter's extended sermon to the astonished crowd in Solomon's Colonnade. The chapter moves through two distinct but inseparable phases: the sign (vv. 1–10) and the sermon (vv. 11–26). The healing is not presented as an end in itself — Luke's narrative pacing makes clear that the miracle exists to create a hearing for the message. Peter refuses to accept credit for the healing (vv. 12–13) and drives the crowd immediately to the theological and moral reality behind it: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus, whom Israel handed over to be killed. The sermon is pointedly covenantal — Peter addresses the crowd as heirs of the prophets and of the covenant made with Abraham (v. 25) — and its demand is repentance, not admiration of the miracle. The chapter closes with the promise that the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant now arrives through repentance and turning from wickedness.

This Text — Intent

God is using Acts 3 to confront every hearer with the claim that the crucified and risen Jesus is the fulfillment of everything Israel was promised, and to call that hearer to repentance as the only fitting response. The intent is not primarily informational (though it is enormously instructive) — it is confrontational in the best sense: God is pressing His claim on every person who witnesses the sign or hears the sermon, demanding that they see Jesus rightly, own their part in His rejection, and turn to receive the promised times of refreshing. The chapter is also intended to model for the church how miraculous signs function — they serve proclamation, they do not replace it.

Subject Sentence: The risen and glorified Jesus fulfills Israel's covenant promise and now calls all people to repentance.

Primary Claim: God is confronting every hearer — through the unmistakable sign of this healing and the undeniable logic of Peter's sermon — with the reality that the Jesus they rejected is the Messiah they were promised, and that repentance is not one option among many but the only door into the covenant blessings now available.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Nature and Purpose of the Healing

A significant interpretive question concerns the relationship between the miracle and the message. In Pentecostal and Charismatic readings, the healing tends to receive roughly equal billing with the sermon — the “signs and wonders” ministry of the early church is foregrounded as a normative expectation and a central expression of the kingdom’s arrival. The healing is often treated as itself a complete act of ministry, with the sermon as a secondary accompaniment. This reading is worth *acknowledging* for its corrective against a purely word-centered ministry that fails to engage the full power of the Spirit, but it must be *qualified* significantly: Luke’s own narrative architecture subordinates the sign to the sermon. The miracle creates the audience; Peter redirects the audience immediately away from the miracle and toward the risen Christ. The lame man’s healing is explicitly framed as testimony to the name of Jesus (v. 16), not as an independent demonstration of kingdom power. The sign is instrumental; the proclamation is primary.

“Times of Refreshing” and Restoration Eschatology (v. 19-21)

Dispensational interpreters often read verses 19–21 as a conditional offer to national Israel: had Israel repented corporately at this moment, the kingdom would have been immediately established and Christ would have returned. This reading treats the passage as a hinge-point in the dispensational program — a “parenthesis” opened because Israel rejected the offer. This reading must be *refuted* on several grounds: (1) Peter addresses this crowd not as national Israel making a formal covenantal decision, but as individual covenant heirs who are personally responsible for their involvement in Jesus’ death (v. 17 — “you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers”); (2) the “times of refreshing” and “restoration of all things” language is best read within the realized-yet-consummating eschatology of the New Testament, in which these blessings flow from the present reign of the risen Christ, not from a future national acceptance; (3) the covenantal framing in verses 24–26 presents the blessing as already arriving — “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you” (v. 26, present/ongoing action). The Reformed reading sees the “times of refreshing” as referring to the blessings of the new covenant age, already inaugurated, and the “restoration of all things” as the consummation toward which the present age moves — with or without national Israel’s mass repentance as a precondition.

Repentance and Human Responsibility

Wesleyan/Arminian readers rightly emphasize the genuine human responsibility present throughout Peter’s sermon — “you denied the Holy and Righteous One” (v. 14), “you killed the Author of Life” (v. 15), “repent therefore, and turn back” (v. 19). This genuine weight of human responsibility and genuine call to active repentance is fully affirmed in the Reformed reading and should not be softened. Where the Arminian reading sometimes *overreaches* is in treating the call to repentance as evidence that repentance is a human contribution to salvation — a self-generated turning that precedes and conditions grace.

The Reformed reading notes that even in this passage, the capacity to repent is grounded in what God has already accomplished (the resurrection, v. 15; the sending of the servant, v. 26) and is enabled by the name and faith given through Christ (v. 16). Grace precedes and enables the repentance it commands.

The Servant Christology of Verses 13 and 26

Peter's repeated use of "servant" (*pais*) in connection with Jesus (vv. 13, 26) explicitly invokes the Isaianic Servant trajectory. Some interpreters read this as a low Christology — Jesus as exemplary servant rather than divine Son. This must be *refuted*: the "servant" language is set within a framework that identifies this servant as the one through whom the Abrahamic blessing comes to all nations, the one predicted by Moses as the prophet greater than himself (v. 22), and the Holy and Righteous One (v. 14). The servant Christology is high, not low — it is covenantally and canonically thick, placing Jesus at the apex of the entire redemptive-historical line.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 52:13–53:12** — The Suffering Servant whom God will exalt; Peter's "servant" language in vv. 13 and 26 draws explicitly on this trajectory, and the healing itself is a display of what the Servant's exaltation accomplishes.
 - **Deuteronomy 18:15–19** — Moses' promise of a prophet greater than himself whom the people must hear; Peter quotes this directly in verse 22, identifying Jesus as the fulfillment and thereby grounding the call to repentance in covenantal obligation rather than mere invitation.
 - **Genesis 12:1–3; 22:18** — The Abrahamic covenant promise that through Abraham's offspring all nations will be blessed; Peter cites this in verse 25 and declares its fulfillment has arrived through Jesus — the Primary Claim's covenantal frame is rooted here.
 - **Psalms 16:8–11** — Cited by Peter in Acts 2:25–28 (the chapter immediately preceding), this psalm grounds the resurrection of Jesus in prophetic anticipation and establishes the pattern: the Holy One will not see corruption. Acts 3's proclamation of the risen Christ stands on this foundation.
 - **Luke 24:44–47** — The risen Jesus' own declaration that the Law, Prophets, and Psalms all point to Him — His suffering, resurrection, and the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness in His name to all nations. Acts 3 is the first extended fulfillment of this commission in Luke's second volume.
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Aim: To show that the risen Christ is not a figure of distant theology but a present claim on every hearer — one that demands a verdict, offers genuine grace, and cannot be met with neutral admiration.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
3:1	Peter and John going to the temple at the hour of prayer (3:00 PM)	Continuity with Jewish practice in the early Jerusalem church; sets the scene
3:2	A man lame from birth is carried to the gate Beautiful daily to beg	“From birth” is emphatic — this is not an acquired condition; the miracle’s magnitude is established before it occurs
3:3–5	The man asks Peter and John for money; they direct his attention fully to them	“Look at us” — the man is expecting alms; his frame is entirely economic
3:6	Peter declares: no silver or gold, but in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk	The healing is explicitly in the name of Jesus — not in Peter’s personal authority or spiritual power
3:7–8	Peter takes him by the right hand, lifts him up; immediately he is healed and walks, leaps, praises God	The physicality and immediacy are both noted; the man’s first response is worship
3:9–10	All the people see him walking and praising God; they recognize him and are filled with wonder and amazement	The public visibility of the miracle is essential — it creates the audience for the sermon
3:11	The healed man clings to Peter and John in Solomon’s Colonnade; the crowd runs together	The man’s gratitude and the crowd’s astonishment create the occasion
3:12	Peter immediately deflects: “why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him	This is the interpretive key to the whole chapter: miracles serve proclamation, not personal reputation

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	walk?"	
3:13	The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate	Covenantal invocation — this is the God of Israel acting; the crowd's guilt is named directly
3:14–15	You denied the Holy and Righteous One, asked for a murderer, and killed the Author of Life — whom God raised from the dead	The charge is escalating and triple: denied / asked for a murderer / killed the Author of Life
3:16	The name of Jesus, through faith in His name, has made this man strong — the faith that is through Jesus has given him perfect health	The healing is explicitly tethered to Jesus' name and to faith; the sermon's thesis is crystallized here
3:17	Peter acknowledges they acted in ignorance, as did their rulers	Pastoral softening — not to diminish guilt but to open the door to repentance
3:18	God foretold through all the prophets that His Christ would suffer — and He has fulfilled it	The suffering was not a defeat; it was the fulfillment of prophetic proclamation
3:19	"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out"	The sermon's central imperative — the proper response to all that has been declared
3:20–21	"...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things"	The eschatological horizon: present refreshing in repentance; future consummation at Christ's return
3:22–23	Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up a prophet like me from your brothers — you shall listen to him in everything... every soul who does not listen to that	The call to repentance is not optional — it is covenantally obligatory; to ignore the prophet is to be cut off

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
3:24	prophet shall be destroyed” All the prophets from Samuel onward proclaimed these days	The entire prophetic line points to this moment
3:25	“You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed’”	The covenant promise to Abraham is the framework; the blessing is arriving; these people are the heirs
3:26	“God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness”	The blessing is defined: turning from wickedness — repentance itself is the covenant blessing, not merely the condition for it

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	3:1–10	The Sign: A Lame Man Healed in the Name of Jesus
2	3:11–16	The Sermon Begins: The Name Behind the Sign
3	3:17–21	The Call: Repent and Receive Times of Refreshing
4	3:22–26	The Ground: All the Prophets, the Covenant, and the Blessing Now Arriving

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The risen and glorified Jesus fulfills Israel’s covenant promise and now calls all people to repentance.

Primary Claim: God is confronting every hearer — through the unmistakable sign of this healing and the undeniable logic of Peter’s sermon — with the reality that the Jesus they rejected is the Messiah they were promised, and that repentance is not one option among many but the only door into the covenant blessings now available.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] — See the sign rightly: miracles point beyond themselves. The crowd's astonishment at the healing was real, but it was pointed in the wrong direction — at Peter and John, not at Jesus. Peter immediately corrected their interpretive frame: “why do you stare at us?” The application is not merely historical. Wherever God does something remarkable — in answered prayer, in providential rescue, in a life dramatically changed — our first instinct is often to fix on the instrument (the preacher, the program, the coincidence) rather than on the name behind the work. Acts 3 trains the mind to ask a different question: not “how did this happen?” but “who did this, and what is He saying through it?” Every display of God's power in your life or your community is a sermon before words are spoken. Learn to read the sign, not merely marvel at it.

2. [Affections/Worship] — Let the weight of the charge land: you have denied the Holy and Righteous One. Peter's accusation in verses 13–15 is not abstract. “You denied the Holy and Righteous One. You asked for a murderer to be released. You killed the Author of Life.” The crowd did not consider themselves enemies of God — they were religious, temple-going Jews who simply aligned with their leaders. Yet the charge stands. This is not primarily a historical lesson about Jerusalem in 30 AD. The passage calls every hearer to feel the moral weight of what sin does: it prefers Barabbas to Jesus. It chooses self-protection over truth. It silences the Author of Life. Before repentance becomes a decision, it must become a grief. Let your heart sit with what it has actually done and preferred. The times of refreshing on the other side of repentance (v. 19) are sweeter because this side of repentance is honest.

3. [Will/Behavior] — Repent concretely, not generically. Peter's call in verse 19 is not “feel bad about your spiritual state” — it is “repent and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.” The word *turn back* implies a previous direction and a new one. The application presses the hearer to identify the specific wickedness from which they need to turn (v. 26 — “turning every one of you from your wickedness”) rather than offering a fog of general spiritual regret. What specific misplaced loyalty, specific habituated sin, specific denial of Jesus' lordship needs to be named, confessed, and turned from? The covenant blessing arrives through turning, not through emotional intensity. Name the thing. Turn from it. Trust the blotting-out that follows.

4. [Mind/Belief] — Understand that the Abrahamic covenant blessing is not suspended — it is being fulfilled right now. Peter closes his sermon by reminding his hearers that they are sons of the covenant — heirs of the promise to Abraham that in his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed (v. 25). Then he says: this blessing is arriving now, through Jesus. This means the gospel is not a departure from the covenant story — it is the covenant story completing itself. For a hearer who wonders whether Christianity is a new religion or whether the God of the New Testament is the same God as the Old, Acts 3 answers with crystalline clarity: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is

the one who raised Jesus, and the blessing promised to Abraham is the turning from wickedness that Jesus makes possible. The story is one. The God is one. The blessing is now.

5. [Affections/Worship] — Worship the Author of Life who submitted to death in order to become the source of life for you. Verse 15 contains one of the most jarring juxtapositions in the New Testament: “you killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead.” The one who is by nature the source and originator of all life submitted to death by the hands of those He had given life. This is not primarily a statement to produce guilt (though it does) — it is a statement to produce worship. The Author of Life chose the cross. He did not have to. He cannot be killed against His will — He is the Author of Life. He submitted. For you. The resurrection is not merely the reversal of a tragedy; it is the vindication of a plan. Worship the one who authored your life, submitted to death, and rose again so that the covenant blessing — turning from wickedness and into Him — could reach you.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Acts 3 establishes a foundational theological principle that governs all Christian proclamation: the name of Jesus is not one spiritual resource among many but the singular locus of God’s saving power in the present age. The healing of the lame man is explicitly attributed to Jesus’ name (v. 6, v. 16), not to apostolic authority or spiritual gifting as free-standing capacities. Equally important is the chapter’s insistence that the risen Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s entire covenantal and prophetic history — Moses, all the prophets from Samuel onward, and the Abrahamic promise all converge on Him. God’s purposes have not pivoted away from Israel or from His covenant word; they have arrived at their appointed destination. The resurrection is not the reversal of a plan gone wrong but the vindication of a plan long announced. And the blessing of that plan — repentance itself — is both gift and command, now available to all.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Acts 3 displays with unusual clarity the Reformed conviction that grace precedes and enables repentance rather than following it as a reward. Peter calls for repentance (v. 19), but only after declaring what God has already done: raised Jesus (v. 15), fulfilled the prophets (v. 18), and sent His servant to bless the people by turning them from their wickedness (v. 26). The repentance is commanded, but the capacity and the blessing are grounded in prior divine action. This is monergistic grace operating through the means of proclamation — exactly the pattern the Reformed tradition insists upon. The chapter also grounds the gospel proclamation in redemptive-historical covenant fulfillment rather than in abstract spiritual transaction, reflecting the covenant theology that runs through the Reformed tradition from Calvin to Vos to Clowney: the

gospel is not a new program but the arrival of what was always promised. The church proclaims not a departure from Israel's story but its culmination.

Main Takeaway

Jesus is not a spiritual option for people who prefer religion — He is the Author of Life, the fulfillment of every covenant promise, the one whose name alone heals, and the one whom you have denied. The door is not closed. But there is only one door: repentance and turning back, through which the times of refreshing come. Stop admiring the miracle and answer the sermon.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the miracle as the main event.** The single most common mishandling of Acts 3 is giving the healing of the lame man the weight Luke does not give it. The miracle is approximately ten verses; the sermon is sixteen. More importantly, Peter himself refuses to let the miracle be the main event — he immediately redirects the crowd away from himself and toward Jesus. A sermon on Acts 3 that spends most of its energy on the healing, its mechanism, or its implications for contemporary healing ministry has inverted Luke's own emphasis. The miracle is a sign; preach what it signifies.
- **Softening the charge in verses 13–15.** Peter says to a religious, pious, temple-going crowd: you handed over the Holy and Righteous One, you asked for a murderer, you killed the Author of Life. This is not gentle. Many expositors soften this to “the people of Jerusalem made a mistake” or contextualize it into irrelevance for contemporary hearers. The charge must land — not to produce condemnation but to make repentance serious and the blotting-out of sins glorious. Preaching that skips the indictment produces cheap grace and shallow repentance.
- **Treating “times of refreshing” (v. 19) as a purely future eschatological category.** Some expositional approaches read verse 19 as entirely forward-pointing — the refreshing comes only at the end, not now. But the passage presents the times of refreshing as the consequence of present repentance (“repent... *that* times of refreshing may come”). The refreshing has an inaugurated dimension — the blessings of the new covenant age, beginning now, for those who turn. Do not rob repentant hearers of present comfort by deferring all refreshing to the eschaton.
- **Importing the Dispensational “conditional kingdom offer” framework.** The reading that Acts 3:19–21 represents a suspended offer to national Israel — whereby their corporate rejection sent the kingdom program into parenthesis — requires importing a theological grid that the text itself does not supply. Peter

addresses individuals responsible for individual response, within a covenantal framework already being fulfilled (v. 26: “sent him to you first, to bless you”). Preach the text’s own covenantal fulfillment framework; do not interrupt it with a dispensational interlude.

- **Reducing the application to “be bold like Peter.”** The Clowney anti-moralism principle applies directly here. Peter’s boldness is remarkable, but a sermon that ends with “go and be bold in sharing your faith” has extracted a behavioral implication from the margins of the text while ignoring its center. The text is not primarily about Peter’s courage; it is about Jesus’ name, the crowd’s guilt, and the covenant blessing now available through repentance. Applications should flow from the Primary Claim, not from the character traits of the human instruments in the narrative.
- **Failing to preach the covenantal thickness of verse 25–26.** Many expositions treat the Abrahamic citation in verse 25 as a historical footnote. It is not — it is Peter’s closing argument. He is saying: you are the heirs of the promise. The blessing is arriving. It is arriving as repentance and turning from wickedness. To miss this is to miss why the gospel is good news and not merely a demand. The covenant promise is being fulfilled in this moment, for this crowd, through this call to repentance. Preach the richness of that arrival.