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Acts 2:22-24

Cookies and the Cross

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Have you ever been **blamed** for something you didn't do? Kids do this all the time, right? You tell them not to eat the **chocolate chip** cookies and when you come back into the room the cookies are **gone**. And you ask the child, "Did you eat the cookies?" And he says, "No, my brother did." Of course, you have to ignore the **chocolate wiped across his face**, that he's holding an **empty cookie jar**, and that his **brother** was with you the whole time.

But what if someone blamed you for something more serious like **stealing** from a bank or **hurting** someone? What would you do then? That's the **question** that **faced a crowd** of people gathered in **Jerusalem** 2,000 years ago. A man named Peter got up to speak and declared that they were responsible for the death of a **local Rabbi** named Jesus (Peter was one of his first disciples). Some of them were from Jerusalem, and were **probably there** when he was crucified, maybe even shouting with the **mob** "crucify him, crucify him!" But others were from **other parts** of Israel and were probably **not there**. But Peter says that they are **collectively responsible** for the death of Jesus.

Acts 2:22-23 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.
23 This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (NIV®)

Peter **reminds** them **who Jesus is**. Jesus is from the small dusty town of **Nazareth**. People wondered if anything good could come out of Nazareth (John 1:46). We may not like to admit it, but there might be places we think, "Can anything good come from there?" I grew up in **Colorado**; and for me was a place called **Greeley**. If you drove through Greeley in the late afternoon, the whole city smelled like **cow manure** because it was right next to cattle farms. Jesus was from a place like Greeley.

We love those stories of people who come from **humble beginnings** but make it **big**, like **Mark Wahlberg** from **Dorchester** or **Amy Poehler** from **Burlington**. Well Jesus attracted quite a following in his day because he performed miracles. He opened the eyes of the **blind**. He healed the **crippled**. He cleansed the **lepers**. He cast out **demons** from the possessed. He raised people from the **dead**. And he **forgave** sins. Jesus was not just a man from God, he actually was God. In Jesus, **God came in the flesh**.

So when Peter says they **nailed** him to the cross, he's pointing out their **rejection of Jesus**. We also can be held responsible for something we didn't do individually, but **collectively**. If a small group of **soldiers** carries out a **mission on foreign soil**, we as a **nation** can be held responsible. Whether or not Peter's audience was physically there, everyone in the crowd was responsible. And so are we today.

You and I are also **responsible**. We may not have **driven** the physical nails through Jesus' hands, but we are responsible for what we do with the **message of Jesus Christ**. If we **reject** him, we're just as **guilty**. Now that **escalated quickly**! First we were blamed for stealing **cookies** and now we're **crucifying** Jesus?! We're only **innocent** if there's **no chocolate** on our **face**. But if I look in the **mirror**, I find I **often** reject Jesus. I don't always believe in him and I often prefer **my way** instead of God's way.

- If you're like **Peter** and follow Jesus, are you **daily accepting** or **rejecting** the message of Jesus Christ? We can say we believe in Jesus, but still live lives far from him. That's like going through your day with chocolate on your **face**. Don't you wish you had looked in a mirror and wiped it off?
- If you're like the **crowd**, are you willing to believe that you're responsible for doing something with the message of Jesus. A **true friend** is someone who tells you when you have food on your face or between your teeth. Now you now you have chocolate on your face. What will you do now?

Peter has given the crowd a pretty **tough** message, but **before** he even tells them they're responsible, he gives them **hope**. He says they may be responsible for Jesus' death, but it was **God's plan** for Jesus to die. God used their rejection of Jesus to **accomplish** our salvation. Peter says...

Acts 2:24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. (NIV®)

God used humankind's rejection of Jesus to **defeat death**. How do you defeat death? By **reversing** it, by coming **back to life**. God raised Jesus so that sin no longer has a hold on us. God raised Jesus so that you and I can be forgiven, and don't have to be held responsible for our rejection of him. Jesus is the **brother** who takes our place. He wipes the chocolate **off** our **faces**, takes the **empty cookie jar** out of our hands, and deals with the **sin** in our **hearts**. He **forgives** us and he **pays** the **penalty** for us with his own life.

At the end of the day, none of us are **blameless** but Jesus. He's the **innocent brother**, he's the holy God; and he offers to take our punishment so that we can live. When Peter's original audience heard they were guilty, the Bible says "they were **cut** to the **heart**" and **asked** him what they should do (Acts 2:37).

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NIV®)

- **Repentance** means confessing your sins. Confess the ways you have rejected God in your everyday life, whether through a life lived far from him or not believing in Jesus.
- Peter also says to **be baptized**. Baptism is when you're **immersed** in water for a symbolic reason. It's a little **chilly** to do any baptisms today, so let's ask what **baptism means**. **Baptism** is a **picture** of the **resurrection**. In baptism, when you go under the water that's a **symbolic death** with Jesus, and coming back up from the water is a **symbolic resurrection** with Jesus. If you get baptized, it means you believe in Jesus' death and resurrection, and identify spiritually and one day physically with him.

So for us today, Peter's call to **repent and be baptized** means to **confess our sin** and **believe in Jesus' death and resurrection**. That's what **Easter** is really all about. It's about us who are **guilty** and **dying** in our sin letting Jesus take our place. He's the brother that **willingly** takes our **blame**. If you don't know Jesus, I encourage you to **repent** and **believe** and **experience** the resurrection of **Jesus Christ** in your life.

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message at our Easter Sunrise service for our church and the community of Westford. Click to listen to more sermons or to read our story.