

Witnessing Miracles

Acts 3:1–26

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
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Last Sunday, Ben shared with us Luke's account of the Apostle Peter preaching a sermon explaining what happened on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first began indwelling believers in Jesus Christ. Today, we are going to take a look at Peter preaching a sermon explaining another miracle, the healing of a man who was born unable to walk in Acts Chapter 3. And one of the things this should teach us today is to not settle for what we expect from God but to seek what He wants for us.

I'll start by reading Acts 3:1-3 which says: *Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.*

Peter and John were both commissioned by Jesus and recognized by the early Christians as apostles, special ambassadors of Jesus who started churches and wrote Scripture. Acts 2:43 told us, many signs and wonders were done through the apostles. Acts 3 is the account of one specific example.

There are at least three reasons why Luke found it important to share the story of this miracle...

1. to give an example of what Acts 2:43 mentions.
2. to have an opportunity to share another sermon of Peter.
3. to show why the earliest Christians were persecuted, because that is what this great story led to in the next chapter.

Apparently, Peter and John saw no problem in continuing their Jewish custom of prayer at certain hours of the day. They were not going to the temple at the hour of sacrifice which preceded the *hour of prayer* because the sacrificial system was fulfilled by the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross.

Peter and John entered the temple at the gate *called Beautiful*: It was pretty spectacular. The Jewish historian Josephus described this gate as being made of fine Corinthian brass; 75 feet high with huge double doors.

This man hanging out at the temple's Beautiful gate had been lame since birth and he... *asked for alms*, a hand-out. He simply wanted to be supported in the condition he was in. But God had something much better in mind.

- The man had good reason to believe that begging at the Beautiful gate could support him. There was a strong tradition of alms-giving to the poor in Judaism as an act of righteousness.

Next let's read what Peter said to the lame man in Acts 3:4-6 which says: *And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."*

The man must have been encouraged when Peter and John looked at him so intently. Most people avoid eye contact with beggars. When Peter and John did look at him, he probably thought he had a big gift coming.

- Like the lame man, we also are often much too ready to settle for less than God wants to give to us, and thus our low expectations rob us.

Peter didn't have any money, but he did have authority from Jesus to heal the sick. Peter knew what it was like to have God use him to heal others, because Jesus had trained him in this, Luke 9:1-6.

It is interesting to note that Peter healed *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*: the fact that Jesus was from the insignificant town of Nazareth had been used to insult Him. But now Peter waved it like a banner. Jesus didn't come into the world in a privileged, wealthy family as most would have expected of the Messiah, he came more humbly with no special advantages.

Moving on to verses 7-10 which says: *And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them; walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

It was one thing to say, “*rise up and walk,*” but it was a much greater thing to boldly take the man’s hand and lift him to his feet. At this moment, Peter exhibited the spiritual gift of faith, a supernatural ability to trust God in this situation.

- Peter didn’t do what he did on a whim, he had to have been prompted by the Holy Spirit. God gave Peter the supernatural ability to trust Him for something completely out of the ordinary.

Strength came to the lame man when Peter said “*rise up and walk,*” and this was seen when he took him by the right hand to lift him up.

Doctor Luke here used the technical words of a medical man. The word translated “*feet*” is only used by Luke, and occurs nowhere else. And the phrase “*ankle-bones*” is again a medical term found nowhere else. The word translated “*leaping up*” describes the coming suddenly into socket of something that was out of place, the articulation of a joint. So, this was a pretty specific medical description of what happened in this man’s healing.

As soon as he was healed, the formerly lame man did three good things. First, he attached himself to the apostles and *entered the temple with them*. Secondly, he immediately started to use what God had given him *walking and leaping*. Finally, he began to praise and worship God.

The leaping of the healed man makes me think of a prophecy that would be fulfilled at the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah 35:6 – *Then the lame shall leap like a deer*. Certainly, there were several occasions when Jesus healed the lame and here, we see His disciples doing the same. And that brings to mind the promise of Jesus...

John 14:12 – *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*

Acts 4:22 tells us that this man was more than 40 years old having been crippled since birth. Verse 10 here tells us he was a familiar sight at this temple gate. So, Jesus must have passed him by many times without healing him...

- One reason Jesus didn’t heal him was because God’s timing is just as important as His will, and it was for His greater glory that this man was healed from heaven through His apostles.

Do we have this kind of healing today? Certainly, people are healed miraculously as an answer to prayer. **Who here knows someone who was miraculously healed? How do you know it was a miracle?** We just don’t see the type of healing that is described in Acts through a person with the gift of healing. I believe that sort of healing happened to authenticate someone as an Apostle so it generally only happened in the times of the Apostles. We don’t have the office of Apostle today because Scripture is not being written today. The Bible is complete. I think there is a gift of apostleship for people skilled in planting churches but that does not mean they are writing inspired text that should be added to the Bible.

Alright, let’s look at the beginning of Peter’s sermon in verses 11-12 which says: *Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon’s, greatly amazed. So, when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”*

Since the formerly lame man could now walk, he didn’t hold on to Peter and John for support. Perhaps he held on to them out of gratitude, or maybe he was fearful of the crowd that gathered around them.

Peter wisely took advantage of the crowd. He would have known that the miracle itself brought no one to Jesus, it merely aroused interest.

- Peter knew that what the crowd needed to hear was the good news of Jesus Christ, and a call to repent and believe. The healed man didn’t know enough yet to share that, so Peter did the talking. Peter knew that saving faith did not come by seeing miracles, rather *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17).
- Peter had been with Jesus on an occasion when the Pharisees accused Him of healing by the power of the devil (Matthew 12:22-32).

Peter started out by denying that the healing was due to either his power or godliness.

- Many faith healers today who wouldn't claim to heal in their own power still give the impression that healing happens because they're so close to God. Peter knew that it was all of Jesus and nothing was of him.

Peter said: *Why do you marvel at this?* His point was simple: Jesus healed all sorts of people when He walked this earth, so why should it seem strange that He continues to heal from heaven through His followers?

Peter continues preaching Jesus in verses 13-15

which says: *“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.*

By opening with this reference to the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, Peter made it clear that he spoke to them about the true God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures.

- The focus of Peter's sermon was not on himself or anything he did, but all about Jesus.

The first thing Peter said about Jesus drew attention to the idea that He was the perfect Servant of the Lord, as the Hebrew Scriptures said He'd be (see Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

- The concept of the 'servant of the Lord' was well-known in Israel because of Isaiah 53 and other texts.

Peter boldly set the guilt of Jesus' death squarely where it belonged by saying, *Whom you delivered up and denied*. Some in the temple crowd had probably been part of the mob that called for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate, the Roman governor, wanted to let Him go, but the Jewish mob insisted on His crucifixion (John 18:29-19:16).

This does not mean that the Jewish people of that day alone were responsible for the death of Jesus. The Gentile Romans were also responsible. The Romans would not have crucified Jesus without pressure from the Jewish leaders, and the Jews could not have crucified Jesus without Roman acceptance of it.

God made certain that both Jew and Gentile shared in the guilt of Jesus' death. In fact, it was not political intrigue or circumstances that put Jesus on the cross; it was in fact our sin. If you want to know who put Jesus on the cross, look at me – or look in the mirror.

Peter was not afraid to confront their sin, and he showed great boldness. While the healing miracle was pretty amazing, it only set up the opportunity for Peter to deliver a powerful sermon that, according to Acts 4:4 led to many being saved.

In v14, Peter exalted Jesus as God referring to Him as the *Holy One*. The term Holy One is used more than 40 times in the Old Testament as a title for the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*.

Peter also pointed out that the mob *asked for a murderer to be released*. One of the ironies of the crucifixion of Jesus is that while the crowd rejected Jesus, they embraced a criminal and a murderer named Barabbas (Luke 23:13-25, John 18:39-40).

In v15, Peter told them they *killed the Prince of life*. Of course, the Prince of life could not remain in the grave, and the apostles were witnesses to His rising from the dead.

Peter describes how the man was healed in verse 16

which says: *And His name [that is Jesus], through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through [Jesus] has given [this formerly lame man] this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

Peter said that it was faith in the name of Jesus that healed this man. This means that Peter consciously healed the man in the authority and power of Jesus, not his own authority and power. Peter would not even take credit for the faith that was exercised in the healing because it was Jesus who gave it to him.

- The Hebrews put a high value on a name, it didn't just identify or distinguish a person, it expresses the very nature of that person's being.

When God's people do good in this world, they do it through faith in the name of Jesus. The temptation is always to do things trusting in someone or something else. Like: good intentions, their own skill, material resources, their prior success or in hard work. But there is so much more power in doing what we do to glorify God in the name of Jesus.

In verses 17 & 18 Peter explains the sufferings of Jesus, which says: *Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*”

Though Peter spoke boldly to them about their sin, he didn't impugn their character. He still connected to them as brethren. Notice that twice Peter had accused them of denying Jesus in verse 13 & 14, something Peter had himself done.

Peter recognized that the mob called for the execution of Jesus in ignorance of God's eternal plan. This did not make them innocent, but it would serve to ease their guilt somewhat. If we sin in ignorance, it is still sin; but it is different from sin done intentionally with full knowledge.

Despite all the evil they did to Jesus, it did not change or derail God's plan. God used it to fulfill what the prophets said the Messiah would do. God can take the most horrible evil and use it for good. Joseph could say to his brothers, *“you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.”* (Genesis 50:20) The same principle was at work in the crucifixion of Jesus and is at work in our lives...

Romans 8:28 – *we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

Alright, here is the remedy where Peter calls them to repentance in verses 19-21 which says: *Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

As he did in his first sermon (Acts 2:38), Peter called on the crowd to repent. He told them to turn around in their thinking and actions.

- Peter spoke boldly to them about their sin, but he didn't just want to make them feel bad. That wasn't the goal. The goal was to encourage them to repent and believe.

Repentance does not describe just being sorry, but it involves a change of what you think and do regarding sin. And as Peter used it in chapter two, here also he made repent a word of hope. He told them that they had done wrong; but that they could turn it around and become right with God.

The specific kind of repentance He was making a case for was for them to *be converted* from an unbeliever to a believer in Jesus Christ. This conversion would involve God's work of bringing new life to us. Being a Christian is not just “turning over a new leaf,” it is being a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17).

- A better translation of “*be converted*” is, “*turn to God*” – or, even better, “*flee to Jesus*” as their place of refuge.

The first benefit of repentance Peter presented to them was *that your sins may be blotted out*: The one who repents and is converted is forgiven their sins, and even the record of their sin is erased.

- Having our sins *blotted out* has the idea of wiping ink off of a document. Ink in the ancient world had no acid content and didn't “bite” into the paper. It could almost always be wiped off with a damp cloth. Peter said that God would wipe away our record of sin just like that.

The second benefit of repenting and turning to God Peter mentioned is: *So that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*: In speaking of “times of refreshing,” Peter referred to the time when Jesus will return and rule the earth in righteousness. The *times of refreshing* is connected to the *times of the restoration of all things*. And that refers to the Eternal State which is foreshadowed by the Millennial Kingdom that Jesus would establish when He returns. Isaiah 65 describes the Millennial Kingdom as a time when most of the curse would be removed so that only unbelievers would die after they're 100-years-old. Those faithful to Christ would never die. And the curse of death will be completely removed during the Eternal State.

Peter went so far as to say, “*that He may send Jesus Christ,*” thus implying that if the Jewish people as a whole repented, God the Father would send Jesus to return in glory. Peter thus made it clear here that Jesus will remain in heaven until the times of restoration of all things, and since the repentance of Israel is one of the “all things”, the return of Jesus in glory will not happen until Israel repents as a nation.

Peter essentially offered Israel the opportunity to hasten the return of Jesus by embracing Him on a national level, something that must happen before Jesus will return to establish the Millennial Kingdom. The Bible reveals that Israel as a nation would recognize Jesus as their Messiah during a 7-year period of time preceding the Lord's return called Jacob's Trouble in Jeremiah 30:7. We see the stage being set for the time of Jacob's Trouble today in the re-establishment of Israel, the rise of globalism, and many other signs Jesus called birth pangs in the Olivet Discourse. But we in the church should be encouraged as we see these developments because our Bridegroom Jesus will come for us and resurrect us at the rapture of the church before the time of Jacob's Trouble.

One may raise the question, if the Jews of that day had received the gospel as a whole, would then Jesus had returned way back then? Hypothetically, that may have been the case, but there is no point in speculating about something that didn't happen! And their national rejection of Jesus was to our benefit:

Romans 11:11-12 – *I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!*

In a lesser, though glorious sense, God sends times of refreshing individually to His people today. As Jesus promised in John 10:10, *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* Knowing that this mortal life is not all there is enables us to enjoy living without having to worry about it coming to an end. And we should pray for and believe God for seasons of revival and refreshing.

Alright, Peter wraps up his sermon explaining the danger of rejecting Jesus in verses 22-26 which says: *For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'* Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus,

sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

The Jewish people of Peter's day were aware of this prophecy of Moses which was recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15, but some thought that the Prophet would be someone different than the Messiah. Peter made it clear that they are one and the same.

The destruction promised in the prophecy of *every soul who will not hear that Prophet* [and thus] *be utterly destroyed*, would become the legacy of this generation of Jews. Many of this generation, but certainly not all, rejected Jesus twice over: once when Jesus was on earth and again when His disciples spoke of Him.

- So, this is the third blessing that comes from repenting and turning to Jesus – being spared the promised judgment of God.

Peter here also mentions *the covenant which God made with our fathers*, specifically to Abraham was that all the families of the earth will be blessed through his descendants. That implied the Gentiles and even us here today. Peter himself would reluctantly embrace this aspect of the New Covenant after God gives him a vision of eating food forbidden by the Mosaic Law in Acts 10.

Verse 26 mentions the fourth blessing that comes from repenting and turning to God is that we'd be turned from our inequities. Jesus blesses us from heaven to turn us away from our sins. This benefits us by avoiding the consequences of sin in the here and now and loss of reward in eternity.

The lame man at the Beautiful Gate wanted a hand-out; but God would give him something much greater. The same was generally true of the Jewish people Peter preached to. They expected the Messiah to deliver them from the tyranny of Rome, but God wanted to give them something much greater. They looked for a political and military Messiah, and not so much one to turn them from their sin. It shows how important it is for us to expect the right things from God and that comes from growing in our relationship with Him by getting to know Him better.

Let's pray...