

The Church Alive – The Life-changing Power of God
Acts 3:1-10

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. 2 And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. 4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” 5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!” 7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. 8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God; 10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

One of the most amazing things in this life is to see God at work changing the lives of people. Whether we look at those who are well known; people like C.S. Lewis or R.C. Sproul, or even if we are talking about ourselves, God transforms skeptics into believers; He restores lives that have been decimated by sin; He turns rebels into ardent followers of His Son. Beloved, day after day, even this day, our God will be doing such things. And this is perfectly consistent with the Scripture which is full of accounts that reveal the power of the Sovereign Lord turning ordinary people like you and me into monuments grace. We have Matthew, the self-seeking tax collector turned into a loyal apostle of Jesus. Remember Mary Magdalene, the demoniac until the Savior set her free. We have Saul of Tarsus, a man hunting down and prosecuting Christians before Christ opened his eyes to his error.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of this key truth, that there is not, has not, and will not be one person who qualifies for the kingdom of God in and of himself. Not one of us deserves any blessings of God. And yet, in His grace, God chooses the unlikely and undeserving and recreates them by the life-changing power of His Son to be vessels that bring glory to His Name.

As we come now to Acts 3, we find our God doing this very thing, changing the life of a cripple, a physically, and spiritually deformed person, who would come to praise the life-changing power of God he experienced. I would like to approach this text by considering two scenes; two scenes that reveal this life-changing power of Christ to change lives and then ask the question; has your life been so changed by the power of Christ?.

I. Scene #1: A man in need (1-5)

Before we look at the man in our text, let us get the background. It had only been a few weeks prior to this scene that Jesus had been crucified for crimes He did not commit and buried in the tomb. Then, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, having conquered death. For the next forty days, Jesus continued to teach His disciples and then He ascended in their sight into heaven, to His throne, where He would sit at His Father's right hand.

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

Then, just ten days later, in fulfillment of Jesus' promise, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and indwelt the followers of Jesus. The church was born. At the first gathering of the church of some 120 people, in the hearing of thousands of other Jews, Peter preached the church's first sermon. Through this message, the Lord added some 3,000 converts to the fellowship. This congregation devoted themselves to the teaching of God's Word, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. As a result, the church continued to grow and the Lord added to their number daily (47). From the end of Acts 2 to the event of Acts 3, some time passed, the amount of which we do not know. But on a particular day, Peter and John, on their way to the temple, met a man in need. In this first scene we find Peter and John engaged in three activities worth noting: It is about 3 pm and in this first scene we find Peter and John engaged in three activities.

A. Peter and John were going to the temple (1).

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.

It is about 3 pm and in this first scene we find Peter and John first headed to the temple together. It is not unusual for us to see Peter and John together in Scripture. In Luke 5:10 we find that they are fishing partners; in Luke 22:8 they made preparations for the last Passover; and in John 20:3-4, they even ran to the tomb together on Resurrection morning. Now here, they are seen going to the temple together.

Our text tells us that they were going to the temple at... ***"the hour of prayer."*** For the Jews, there were three times of prayer; one at 9 am, one at 12 pm and one, as in our text, at 3 pm. You might remember that it was at the ninth hour, or 3 pm that Jesus died. This was the hour of the evening sacrifice and it would have been one of the busiest times at the temple. As we read in Acts 2:46, this was the church's daily practice, to go to the temple and pray, but also, I believe, to evangelize. The early church was not afraid to get out their homes and into the community to practice their worship before others. They did not huddle up in a corner and hoard their God-given blessings. Rather, they were in the world, not of the world, even as Jesus had instructed them. They took the hope of Christ to the needy people around them; not waiting for the needy people to come to them. And on this particular day in the temple, we see the second thing that Peter and John did...

B. Peter and John met a beggar (2-3).

2 And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.

As we will see, this is nothing but a divine appointment, not only for Peter and John, but for this beggar as well. Have you ever stopped to consider this lame man. There are three things we should note about him.

1. He is unnamed.

Our text simply calls him "a man." No one special; no one of notoriety. This unnamed man will be the basis of a lot of activity in both Acts 3 and 4, yet all we know about him is that he is a man in need. I am grateful that God is concerned about the "unnamed" people; people like

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

you and me who are not the noble or great or wise; rather we have simply become the beloved of God.

2. He is unable to walk.

Not only is the man unnamed, but this man is also **“lame from his mother’s womb.”** He was born this way, having spent his entire life crippled. Never had he taken a step in his life. And God is about to use this man to bring Himself glory. Beloved, if God can use a birth defect to bring Himself glory, He can use anything and anyone. This was true as well for the man born blind in John 9. After the disciples asked if sin was the reason for the man’s blindness, Jesus said in John 9:3, **“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”**

Beloved, God is more than able to take the most awful, most difficult and most trying things in your life and use them as a vehicle through which to display His life-changing power and glory. This is what we find God doing here in Act 3 to this unnamed, unable to walk beggar. But there is a third thing to note about this man.

3. He is dependent upon others for help.

We are told in our text that on this day, like every other day, the beggar was being carried to his begging post at the temple. This was the only way he could survive, to beg for the pity of others. But it is worse than that, because he could not walk, he had to be carried everywhere he went. Later, in Acts 4:22, we learn that this man was over forty years old. Can you imagine being carried day by day, week by week, year after year to the temple just to get what you needed to survive?

He did have a seemingly well-chosen spot, the gate called Beautiful. The first century Jewish historian Josephus records that this gate was some 75 feet high and some 60 feet wide. It was ornate and immense. The gate itself was so large and heavy it was said to take twenty men to close it. What a spot to plead for help. As the people were going to the temple, presumably God-fearers, how could they not be sensitive to the needs of the helpless? For the Jews of the day, the giving of alms was an act believed to gain favor with God (see Matt 6:1-4).

So we have our man in need, this beggar who daily depended upon other to get him to this place with the hopes to find favor from fellow Jews on their way to worship. As we read verse 3, we find the man sizing up Peter and John and asking them for money. Can you imagine? As Peter and John draw nearer, the lame man calls out to them in his “beggar’s wail” a plea he no doubt had uttered thousands of times. “Alms! Alms for the poor! Just a coin or two, please, for a helpless child of Abraham.” Did it work? Well, Peter and John did stop, but here the story takes a turn and we come to the third activity of Peter and John...

C. Peter and John responded to the need (4-5).

4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” 5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

This is just an incredible account that I would have you consider as Peter and John respond to this man and his need, revealing to us how we ought to respond to the needs of others

1. **They fixed their gaze on the man.**

Sometimes it is easy to miss or discount the sovereignty of God, but it is clearly here in this scene. At this time there would have been thousands of people in the temple area. Additionally, there would have been hundreds of beggars. We know of some nine gates through which Peter and John might have entered, but they entered *this* gate and met *this* beggar at *this* time. Some might say it is nothing but coincidence. Yet anyone who knows the Scriptures knows that there is no such thing as "coincidence" in a universe where God is sovereign. This was a divine appointment – the plan of God. And consider this, that just a few months before, Jesus Himself no doubt had passed through this very gate and had seen this very beggar and had been asked to give him alms. Yet Jesus did not give him money or heal him at that time; at least not at that time, for in the grand plan of God, God had something else in store for him.

It would be on this day that Peter and John would be the hands through which the Master would change this beggar's life. How did this take place? Our text tells us that they "**fixed their gaze**" on the man. They gave this beggar their complete attention. Honestly, when you see a beggar at a store or on a street, what is your natural inclination? Most of us do not want to make eye contact, we want to get past the person unnoticed so that we do not have to be involved. Beggar or not, we too often pass by people without seeing them; without really noticing them and considering their needs. When was the last time you have you *seen* your neighbors like this? Do you really see the people with whom you work or go to school? Our prayer must be to see people they way Peter and John saw this man, with attention and compassion. But not only did they fix their gaze upon him, notice secondly that...

2. **They told the man to look at them.**

In verse 4, Peter gives a command, ordering the man, "**Look at us!**" I doubt that most people who gave anything to this man ever said such a thing. Why did Peter say this? I can only speculate here. But having done this for many years, perhaps the man was in a hopeless rut of meaningless existence. Reduced in him humanity to beg for just enough to buy food for the day. Day after day doing the same thing, with no hope for anything different. But on this day, such a rut is about to be broken. Something extraordinary will happen to him, far greater than a receiving a few extra coins, or even winning the lottery for that matter. When Peter and John are through with this man, not only will he have new legs, but he will really begin to live.

Beloved, some of us are in spiritual ruts. Some of us have known Christ for so long that we have literally forgotten how meaningless life is for those around us outside of Christ. We know that no matter how hard this day may be, we have a hope, we have a future, and we are looking forward to the blessed hope and appearing of our great Savior. But so many of the people around us do not have such a hope; they do not know such a hope. Why do we hold back the message of hope? We need to follow the example of this text and fix our gaze on people and see them in their brokenness, and then boldly call out to them, "**Look!** I have something to offer you that will change your life!"

And how did the unnamed lame man respond to Peter? What was his initial reaction? It was typical as we see that the man did give Peter his attention (5), but with ulterior motives as verse five tells us that he was "**expecting to receive something from them.**" And what was he expecting? He was expecting money. Here Peter wanted to offer the grandest of riches and all the beggar thought of was unfulfilling nothingness. GK Chesterton once said something along

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“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

the lines of this, *that even the man standing at the front door of the brothel is looking for God, he just does not know.* People are looking to anything and everything other than God to fulfill and satisfy them. We need to call people to “look at us” – and then show them the life-changing power of Christ. Sometimes our efforts to share the greatness of the gospel is met with people whose expectations are too low – they think they need money, happiness, a better job, when what they need is a vital relationship with the living God.

This is the end of scene #1, an unnamed man in need, begging for money. As we come to scene #2, all of this changes and changes quickly.

II. Scene #2: We see a man who is changed (6-10).

As the second scene unfolds, we are told what three different parties, namely Peter, the lame man and then the crowd did. We begin with Peter.

A. What Peter did (6-7).

6 But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!” 7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

In what should leave us in gasping awe of the power of God at work in this man’s life, let us note that as Peter interacts with the beggar, he does three things.

1. He did not give the man what he wanted.

In verse 6 Peter responds in an anticlimactic way for the beggar saying, “***I do not possess silver and gold...***” What good then is Peter to this man, for this is what the man wanted. Peter could not fulfill this “need” as he did not have any money. Peter was not a rich man nor were the other apostles. The start of the church was not on the backs of the most wealthy and influential people. In fact, Jesus chose the unlearned, the ordinary and the foolish of the world.

Why did and does God most often continue to use common people? Let us never forget that God does not need anything. He is the God with all things at His disposal. Those who have little are least likely to take credit for the work of God. When I was a young (or younger) pastor at another church, I had a member who came to me shortly after I started and said that he wanted put \$100,000 into the church building fund as an encouragement for me. I was initially flabbergasted and excited. Over the course of the next few weeks, I learned that this man had given substantially to the church in the past, but that such giving also came at a price. This man wanted recognition, wanted to serve on the Elder board (a position for which he was not qualified) and wanted things done his own way. It was not long before he and I were butting heads. One day, he came to my office and said in effect that I had either to do things his way or he would leave the church and would ask for the \$100,000 back. He was quick to remind me that the church was where it was at that time because of all the money and things he had done for it. With much angst I said that I could not in good conscience and biblical conviction operate that way. That was the last time I saw this man and his money was promptly returned to him. Today that church continues to serve the Lord and the community, without the money or the help of that man. God does not need anything. And so Peter does not give this beggar money. Perhaps he

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

could have for in Acts 2:45 we know that the church had and used a benevolent fund. But money was not what this man needed and this brings us to the second thing Peter does...

2. He gave the man what he needed.

“I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you...” I love that last phrase, **“but what I do have I give to you...”** This is to be the attitude of every follower of Jesus. We are to be generous, graciously, greatly, grandly generous. Whatever I have I am willing to give. It may be money, time, possessions, or abilities. But I always have the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ to give to others. Do you consider what you have as tools with which to help others and thus bring glory to God? And Peter had something better than money. As an apostle of Jesus, he had the God-given ability to perform miracles – supernatural feats that point people to the power of God. Peter was about to give to this lame man something that would forever change his life. And of course, what Peter ultimately gives the lame man is something that we are able to give to others. We may not perform miracles like Peter, but we can give to people the knowledge of the One who changes lives. Let us now note Peter’s third response to the beggar....

3. He took action in the name of Jesus Christ.

“In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!” Let us not forget how all this started, a beggar simply looking to get enough to get him by. That is all he wanted, but now Peter would give him what he really needed. Beloved, if we be more effective in sharing Christ, we must learn to give to people not what they want or think they need, but what is really needed, the knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Savior. As one as aptly said (William LaSor), *“It is not the Church’s business in this world simply to make the present condition more bearable; the task of the Church is to release here on earth the redemptive work of God in Christ.”* God will often use a person’s felt needs to help him come to see their most urgent need. With this man, it was the need of money. Some of you here today came to Christ because of felt needs, through a broken marriage, or a health crisis, or a financial strain, or even because of a sense of personal emptiness. The fixing of these things are not the most important need, but can be used to point a person to their truest and greatest need.

Again, Peter said, **“I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!”** This is the second command Peter gave this man; the first to look at him and now the second to “walk”. This is not a suggestion. This is not the man wishing he could walk but Peter is telling the man simply to walk. Peter does not condition the statement saying “If you have faith, I’ll heal you.” Rather, Peter commands him to walk, and he did. In fact, in verse 7 we have something typically Peter, quick, rash, gruff Peter, as we read, **“and seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up...”** Peter grabs the man by the hand and hauls him out of his sitting position, saying in effect, “There, you’re healed!”; And he was! This was extraordinary. Out text says, **“and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.”** The preacher G. Campbell Morgan said of this event, *“Perhaps only medical men can fully appreciate the meaning of these words. They are the peculiar, technical words of a medical man. The word translated feet is only used by Luke, and occurs nowhere else. It indicates his discrimination between the different parts of the human heel. The phrase ankle-bones is again a medical phrase to be found nowhere else. The word ‘leaping up’ describes the*

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

coming suddenly into socket of something that was out of place, the articulation of a joint. This then is a very careful medical description of what happened in connection with this man.” He was healed when Peter took action in the *name* of Jesus Christ.

And there is the key, the name of Jesus. Throughout the opening chapters of Acts there is great attention given to the name of Jesus (3:16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18, 30). Biblically speaking, a name is more than just a means of identifying someone. A name could carry authority. I have some family members that live in a gated community, meaning you have to drive up to a gate where an armed security officer asks you why you are there. I reply, “I am here to see the Manis’.” And on the authority of that name, I am allowed in. The name represented the person and his authority to let me in. In grander fashion, the name of *Jesus* has *all authority* behind it. Jesus said this in Matthew 28:18, that all authority had been given to Him. In Philippians 2:9-11 we read that Jesus has the name that is above every name. And so we find Peter declaring, “***In the name of Jesus Christ (with all His power and authority) the Nazarene — walk (be changed).***”

Remember that the book of Acts is about all that Jesus continues to do and to teach through His people. Here then we see that the power Jesus exercised when He healed the lame during His three year ministry was still operative in the apostles. Peter did what he did, not in his own strength, but because he acted in the name of Jesus. And here is a lesson for us, we can only give to others what truly belongs to us. Believers possess the hope of eternal life, therefore we can give that hope to others. We have the authority of the name and person of Christ to give that hope away. Peter had not only this hope, but also, at this time, the power to heal, in the name of Jesus. And so Peter gave took action. This is what he did, not let us look at what the man did.

B. What the lame man did (8)

With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

I find it noteworthy that Luke includes three participles by which to describe what the lame man did in response to what Peter did.

1. He began walking.

Do you realize what this meant? If a person spends even just a few months in bed due to some illness, it will be difficult for him to walk. This man had never walk, never learned to walk and what did he do immediately, he walked! This man of shriveled muscles and brittle bones was strengthened and made able to walk. But not only did he walk...

2. He began leaping.

How many of you older folks like to jump out of bed in the morning and start leaping over and over? Yet this man was leaping! Why did he leap? I believe that he could do nothing else. Walking was too tame, he had to leap. The way we are to understand this is that the man was leaping and leaping and leaping, probably making any further conversation between him and Peter difficult. This man was excited, changed by the power of God. And that brings us to the final description of this man’s response...

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

3. *He began praising God.*

That this man was changed not simply physically is revealed in that the first thing he did once healed was to go with the apostles to the temple and *praise God*. Beloved, if you have experienced the life-changing power of God, how can you consider anything less than going with God's people to that place where God is being praised? This is the cry of the psalmist in Psalms 107:2-9 -

2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary 3 And gathered from the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south. 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. 5 They were hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. 6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. 7 He led them also by a straight way, To go to an inhabited city. 8 Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! 9 For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

Beloved, when God acts, God deserves praise for His actions – the redeemed of the LORD say so. When we see Him transform a life, we ought to give Him glory. So we have seen what Peter did and what the lame man did, finally we see...

C. **What the people did (9-10)**

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God; 10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

This divinely appointed miracle had a twofold effect on the people in the temple.

1. *The miracle got their attention.*

When a life is truly transformed by God, then it ought to get people's attention. Others see it and be filled with wonder and amazement. Oh that our lives would cause people to be filled with wonder and amazement.

2. *The miracle prepared the people to hear the gospel.*

Just after this event Peter will break into the second sermon given in the church, a sermon in which Peter uses this man's changed life as an example of the power of God at work. Read with me in verse 16 as Peter says, **"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."**

Peter uses the healing of this man as an illustration of what salvation is like. Just as this man was born lame, unable to walk; we are born spiritually lame, unable to walk in a manner that pleases God. This lame man was also poor, and we are spiritually poor, in fact bankrupt before God, unable to pay the debt we owe. This man was sitting outside of the temple, picturing how we as sinners are separated from the presence of God no matter how close to the door we might be. This man was healed completely, totally, immediately. When we come to Christ, we are healed completely, made fit for heaven.

As we read this story, we may think it is about Peter and John, or perhaps about the beggar or the crowd. This story is about Jesus. For even after this man was healed physically,

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“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

he did eventually die, but the testimony of what Jesus did for him continues to be told two thousand years later – a testimony of the life-changing power of God. Sometimes we start a lesson or a sermon with a proposition, a big idea. Let me end this sermon with one. The big idea of Acts 3:1-10 is this, God uses *no names* like you and me, to exalt *The Name* of His Son!

Know this, dear friend. The story we’ve just considered isn’t really about the beggar. Nor about Peter. This is about Christ. The beggar’s body eventually wore out and he died—just like ours will. But what Christ did for him remains as a living testimony. Two thousand years later God is using an unnamed beggar to exalt the greatest name of all, Jesus Christ!

The Point of the Story: God loves to use *no names* to exalt *The Name*! What does this mean for us this morning? Remember I said I would ask you if you have experience the life-changing power of God through the name of Jesus? Have you? Let me remind you of what the book of Acts says we must do with the name of Jesus. Have you done these three things?

1. Have you called on the Name (Acts 2:21).

In Acts 2:21 we read, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** Have you called on the name of Jesus for salvation?

2. Have you been baptized in the Name (Acts 2:38).

In Acts 3:28 we read, **“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...”** Have you turned from your sins to God and publically confessed that intention by being baptized? If you have believed in Christ, you must be baptized in His name—not for salvation, but as a public testimony of your allegiance to Christ.

3. Have you sought to make known the Name.

In Acts 4:12 we read, **“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”** Will you resolve today to make the Name of Jesus known to others?

Soli Deo Gloria

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