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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Acts 3:1-10 “The Church Meeting Needs”

Intro. In 2:43, we read “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.” With that summary statement we will now learn about one of those early miracles performed through the apostles. A man, lame from birth, was miraculously healed. His healing was not necessarily the first miracle to occur after Pentecost, but it was selected from the “many” for 3 reasons: 1) It gave Peter a good opportunity to preach to many people, since the miracle attracted a large crowd (v.12ff). 2) It led to the first serious opposition against the apostles that we will read about in chapter 4. 3) This miracle contains some practical spiritual lessons for us today. I will focus on this last purpose in my message today. There are needy people all around us, and it is my intention to share with you the best way we as a church should meet those needs.

Now v.1 says that Peter and John were on their way to the temple. Now when you read about the temple, do not think of a single building. Rather, picture in your mind not only the temple building itself, but the large courts that surrounded the temple. On the exterior of the courts there would be covered colonnades, and at various places there would be gates leading into the outer temple courts, where Gentiles were permitted. There were also gates leading into the two interior courts. On their way to prayer, they observe a stark contrast. On the one hand, they approached one of the gates called, “The Beautiful Gate.” It was probably the main gate leading from the court of women into the inner court nearest the temple. It is possible that this is the gate that Josephus described as composed chiefly of Corinthian bronze, excelling all other gates in the Temple in the splendor of its appearance. It may have had plates of gold on it. When the morning sun shone upon that beautiful gate it, was absolutely dazzling.¹ Yet, at that beautiful gate was an ugly sight. A man who never was able to walk was there begging for gifts of mercy. We are going to see how God used Peter and John to change this man’s life in a dramatic way, and how God can use us as well. So notice first of all:

I. THE CHRISTIANS WHO MINISTERED TO THE LAME MAN

What great examples Peter and John are to us! God used them to become channels of blessing to meet the needs of this man. And God could use Peter and John because of three characteristics that were true of them, and should be true of us today. Notice the kinds of Christians God will use to bless others:

A. Those United in Fellowship – Notice what v.1 says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” What a picture of what Christ can do! Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John were always at odds with each other. They were very different from each other. Peter was impulsive. He was always speaking out of turn. I can just see John rolling his eyes just about every time Peter spoke up. Peter was a man’s man, quite a bit rough around the edges. But John evidently was the quite type. He was reflective. I believe there was a time when he didn’t like Peter.

¹ In front of this gate were fifteen semi-circular steps on which Levites sang the fifteen "Psalms of the Steps" (Psalms 120-134 him).

But Christ can make the difference. Now they are walking and praying and working together. Several times in chapters 1 & 2 we read of the unity of the early church (e.g. 2:46a). Isn't it a wonderful thing how Jesus can bring believers who are so very different from one another, together in the name of Jesus Christ? The key, of course, was their common love for the Lord Jesus Christ. So no longer were their differences a source of conflict. Instead, now they complemented each other by their differences. John is willing to maintain a role that is secondary and silent except for some corroboration of Peter's testimony. This is exactly what Jesus prayed for in John 17:21, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." If we are going to minister to a hurting world, we need to be unified in each local church, and we should seek as much unity as possible with other churches that have the same commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

On a similar thought, notice that Peter and John work together as a team. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Peter and John ministered as a team after this incident too (8:14). We know that the apostle Paul almost never traveled alone. So I believe the general pattern of Christian ministry should be that of teamwork in one accord. Working with others provides greater accountability and safety from temptation.

Furthermore, God will use:

B. Those Commitment to Prayer – We read in v.1 that they were going together for the afternoon prayer time. God used the early church so wonderfully because the early church was committed to prayer on a regular basis. Please notice that these men had a definite hour for prayer, and they prayed more than once a day. There were three times when the Jews gathered in the temple to pray: at 9:00 in the morning, at 12:00 noon, and then at the ninth hour—3:00 in the afternoon. The Psalmist declared, "Evening, and morning and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice" (Psa. 55:17). Likewise, Daniel prayed three times a day (6:10).

Even so, we should be committed to regular, daily prayer. We should "pray without ceasing" (I Th. 5:17), but it is helpful to have a specific time and place where we meet God in prayer. You will really do better in your personal prayer life, and in your church's prayer life, if you commit to praying at regular times. My main time of daily prayer is in the morning after my daily quiet time of reading God's Word. Our church has set aside Wednesday night as a time when we give more significant attention to prayer. We have a weekly Friday morning prayer time when about eight of us gather for prayer. Are you committed to prayer?

One important aspect of prayer is intercessory prayer. We should intercede on behalf of others. I'm sure that Peter and John engaged in intercessory prayer. Could it be that just the day before, someone spoke up and said, "We need to pray for that lame beggar there at the gate." And so they prayed, "Oh God, what would you have us to do to help that man?" The God must have revealed to Peter that it was His will to heal that man. One of the best ways to help others is to start by praying for them. We should be praying for people to be converted to Christ. We should be praying for the sick. We should be praying to the impoverished. We are more likely to see God work in powerful ways as we are committed to prayer.

Furthermore, God will use:

C. Those Who Show Love and Compassion - They were not "too good" to stop for such a despised person. People all around us are suffering physically, emotionally, and in many other ways. How do you respond to those who are suffering? What is your attitude toward unbelievers? Their lifestyle may be repugnant to you, but you have to keep in mind that this is simply be an

expression of their spiritual condition. Poor old sinners use profane words. Satan and sin has crippled their speech. They don't know how to talk right. These days sinners are abusing their own bodies. We need to show love and concern to such people, just like Jesus did. But we need to do so in specific ways. Now based on this text, let me show you two ways we should demonstrate concern for others:

1. Give People Your Attention - It says in v.4, "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, 'Look on us'." They looked at him steadfastly. Peter and John did not simply give this beggar a casual glance and then pass on by. They gave him their focused attention, unlike the vast majority of worshipers who pass through that gate.

Do you realize that one way you show love is by giving someone your attention? Many people are starving for attention. We husbands need to give our wives some focused attention each day. We parents need to give our kids some focused attention each day. Pastor's, deacons, and small group leaders need to give their people some focused attention, especially the sick and lonely. Church, we need to give hurting people all around us some focused attention! That is one reason why the Bible says numerous times that we are to greet one another.

You no doubt remember the story of the good Samaritan. A traveler fell among thieves, was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Both a priest and a Levite passed by, but they avoided the dying man, walking by on the other side of the road. They hardly even looked his way.

Even so, we have a natural tendency to look away and turn aside from someone who has a need. And in the case of this beggar, the average Jew would have looked down on this man, saying in themselves, "You are a cripple because of your sin, or because your parents sinned" (John 9:2). But that's not the way Jesus was. The Bible says that when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion upon them. We need to stop looking away from souls in need.

So they looked upon the plight of the lame man. But that is not all. As we are moved with love and compassion, we should:

2. Extend a Hand to Others – In v.7 we read, "And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up." Peter was willing to extend a hand to him. This man's faith needed some help; he would not take the initiative. Peter could have simply said, "In the name of Jesus rise up and walk." But I don't think he would have even tried it had it not been for Peter's extended hand. So Peter's aid to initiate movement would encourage the cripple both to believe and to exert effort.

By giving unbelievers a helping hand, we can prove to them that we have a practical interest in them. There are so many situations where we need to give someone a helping hand. A touch, and handshake, a hug can mean so much. Sometimes we need to "nudge" people along toward faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps you need to offer to someone to walk with them when it is time for them to make a public commitment. Have you ever offered to go by and pick up someone, and bring them to church?

At the battle of Waterloo, Wellington ordered his friend General Picton to take a perilous position. Picton replied: "Give me a grasp of your hand, and then I will." So, nerved for the dangerous task, he accomplished his commander's mission.

Now what this man needed most was not a handout. It was not focused attention. It was not even a loving touch. Rather, what he needed most was Jesus. Peter and John really had no ability to help this man with his greatest need. So next, notice with me:

II. THE CHRIST WHO HEALED THE LAME MAN

Beginning in v.6 we read, “Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have² I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Peter knew that he could not heal this man, as he himself confessed in v.11. He did not even know the exact nature of his problem. He was not a physician. He didn’t even have any money to give him, to help them out temporarily. So he told him about the One who could heal him. He said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Peter gave the beggar, not what he asked for, but what he needed: Jesus Christ. Peter understood that he could meet this man’s need only by sharing with Him Jesus Christ. Peter said, “I can’t meet your need, but I know who can.” He is saying I have something a whole lot better than silver and gold. After all, Jesus is the “Great Physician.” He knew the exact bones that needed to be healed. In fact, our author Luke, who *was* a physician, identifies these bones by specific Greek words used in the medical field (v.7). So when the beggar looked up expectantly, he received something far more wonderful and valuable than the largest gift of alms he had ever received. So from this verse we see first of all:

A. The Priority of our Ministry - If you are going to meet the needs of others, you need to realize that what others need most is Jesus Christ. That is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “For I determined not to know anything among you ‘except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.’” The best thing you can ever give an individual is the Lord Jesus Christ. You yourself can only meet a person’s needs in a very limited way. But when you give someone Jesus, all there other needs are taken care of.

So when you give food, do so in the name of Jesus. When you give clothing, do so in the name of Jesus. What people need most of all is Jesus.

B. The Problem of Our Ministry - Too often we try to help people the wrong way. If we give someone money, we might help them out for a while, but soon their need will still be there. You can give a hungry person a meal, but he will be hungry again in a few hours. Someone may offer a sorrowing person a drink, but after the alcohol wears off, they are worse off than before. In contrast to Peter and John, today we have come to rely upon money and worldly means to meet needs and do the work of the Lord. And the more we turn to money or things that money can buy to meet needs, the more ineffective our ministry will be.

In connection with this there is an interesting story of the medieval Church. St. Thomas Aquinas came to Rome to pay his respects to the one who was then Pope (Innocent 11). In the course of his visit, the pope proudly showed him all the wonders of the papal palace and took him to his treasury and showed him chests of silver and gold received from every part of the world. With something of a smile on his face, he said, “You see, Brother Thomas, we cannot say, as did the first ‘pope,’ “Silver and gold have I none.” Thomas Aquinas looked the pope in the eye and fearlessly replied, “No, and neither can you say, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.’” Riches had come, but the power had gone.

If we are not careful we can become like the Laodicean church. In Rev. 3:17 Jesus said to them, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — .” If we are not careful, then as God prospers us, we may tend to rely upon what money can buy, instead of what God alone can do.

² Peter did not say, “such as I have” (KJV), as if it was inferior to money, but he said, “what I have” (Gk.).

It is sad that with the increase of riches, dependence on God and consequently spiritual power often become less. So the church must not rely upon building beautiful buildings, thinking that that alone will get people into our churches. I do not oppose building buildings. But there is something wrong when a church gets more interested in the beauty of its buildings than the reason those buildings are constructed. There is something intrinsically in error about a church that gets wrapped up in the aesthetics of its auditorium instead of being concerned about the spiritual cripples outside the gate who need to come and hear the liberating message of the Lord Jesus Christ!

III. THE CONVERSION OF THE LAME MAN

I say “conversion” because he was not only healed, but the evidence suggests that he also became a Christian. I’m sure he became a great witness for the Lord.

I may be speaking to some who are spiritually crippled. You cannot walk in the ways of the Lord. Isa. 42:24 says of Israel, “For they would not walk in His ways, Nor were they obedient to His law.” Or you may have some other need in your life. I want you to see how God brought about his healing and conversion. First of all, it involved:

A. An Earnest Expectation - Notice what v.5 says of the lame man, “So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.” When Peter and John invited him to look upon them, he responded with steadfast attention (imperfect tense). No doubt he looked with eagerness, “expecting to receive something.” He was needy and knew it. He was very hopeful of receiving a significant gift. He had a right to expect something of them. They were followers of Jesus Christ. So he had a right to get something from the people of God. Where else is this old world going to find what it really needs? At some time in most everyone’s life, the unbelievers of this world will look to the people of God for an answer. With all the school shootings they need to be looking to the church for answers rather than Washington DC.

We should have the same expectancy today. I believe that God blesses that kind of expectancy. When you have a need, look to the Lord with great faith and expectancy. The Bible says, “You have not because you ask not” (James 4:2b). As we pray and look to God, we must then wait upon God with a sense of expectancy. Do you pray with expectancy of what God is going to do? That expectancy ought to characterize our lives.

B. An Exercise of Faith - True faith needs to be based upon the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” So in the last of v.6 Peter indicated that this man’s healing would come through the name of Jesus. No doubt this lame man had heard of Jesus of Nazareth healing others. Jesus probably had passed by him at this very gate. And so, when Peter said, “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk”, he must have believed that Peter was calling upon that same Jesus to heal him also. So based on what he had seen and heard, he was ready to put his faith in Jesus. As a result, we also see:

C. A Dramatic Healing – In v.7 Luke says, “And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” What a miracle of God, that a man who never walk today in his life, was suddenly enabled to walk and even leap from his feet! He was dramatically healed! Notice also that Jesus puts things back together again. The devil is a crippler. He pulls things apart. Jesus Christ is a healer, He puts things back together again.

Notice also that he was “immediately” healed. That physical healing is an illustration of spiritual healing. Just as God did not heal gradually, He does not save gradually. A lost soul can be born again and changed immediately. There are those who could stand up today and give testimony of how the Lord changed their lives immediately upon their conversion.

And so we see next of all:

D. A Dramatic Response - In the last of v.8 we read that the healed man “entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.” Notice the first place he went: the temple. He did not run home. He went through the gate into the inner court of the Temple. What else should a changed life do? His first thought was to unite with God’s people to worship. Notice that he went “with them” into the temple. He wanted to be with Peter and John in God’s house.

The application should be obvious. When God saves your soul, and when He blesses you, you should want to go to church and thank Him, and praise Him. God has been good to us. We ought to want to go to God’s house and worship God. I have a problem believing that someone is truly saved when they have no desire to go to church with God’s people!

Not only did he simply go to the temple, but he praised God. You ought to praise God with your lips, singing out loud from your heart. Think about what God has done for you and then praise Him with words of thanksgiving. And when you think of what Jesus has done for you, it should even make you want to shout. And this man even praised God with his feet. He even was leaping while he was praising God. He was like an old-time pew-jumping Baptist! He didn’t seem too concerned about what people were thinking about his behavior. He was too joyful to care. Yes, we can get wrong in praising the Lord as a mere show. But we often go the other direction, and we are not expressive enough. If your Christian faith doesn’t touch your heart, something is wrong. Some dear saints think they are dignified when they are really petrified.

When we gather at a sporting event, don’t we shout for our team? Don’t we applaud when our team does something well? Don’t we get a bit animated at such sporting events? Well why is it that a lot of people don’t want us to get excited and joyful and raise our voices for God? I’m a fan of the Atlanta Braves, and when I watch their games on TV or at the stadium, I get to shouting at times. You ought to hear Cheryl when they make a great play! Yet those million dollar athletes have never done anything for me except provide some entertainment. None of them died for my sins. Not one will give me eternal life. None of them will be there for me when I go through the trials of life, including the loss of a loved one. Doesn’t Jesus deserve our joyful, loud praise more than ball players?

Conclusion: Have you let Christ change your life? If you have received Jesus as your Savior, you should have no problem walking down this aisle, and by coming, give praise to God for what He has done in your life.

I have also talked about the kind of ministry we should have. We ought to have communion with one another, committed to prayer, and be compassionate to others in need. Do you need to recommit yourself to that kind of ministry?

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); Vance Havner, *Hearts Afire: Light on Successful Soul Winning* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1952), 32-37; H.A. Ironside, *Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint);

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