

The Miracle That Led to Persecution

Acts 3:1-11

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When all seems to be going well, when there is a measure of favor with people (with family, friends, brethren in the church, and those at work), when God is answering prayer in remarkable ways, be ready—be always ready for the Lord to test your faith in Him, to test whether your joy is found only when the blessings are coming your way. We should enjoy and be thankful for the blessings God sends to us each and every day, but we must not so rest our hope or joy in the blessings of today that we are unprepared for the trials, afflictions, and persecutions that lie around the corner.

The apostles of Jesus Christ rejoiced in the wondrous blessings of the Lord in being used to perform miracles (Acts 2:43), in sharing their possessions with one another in the fellowship of brotherly love (Acts 2:44-45), in receiving a favorable response from the people of Jerusalem (Acts 2:47), and in witnessing 3,000 souls being added to the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Wow! What could possibly stand in their way?

As we shall see in the following chapters in the Book of Acts (Acts 4-5), the miracles of God's blessing would bring upon them the wrath of unbelieving man (and in particular the anger of the Jewish authorities) in the form of persecution. A wondrous miracle is wrought by the Lord in Acts 3:1-11, then a crowd gathers to hear the gospel (Acts 3:12-26), and then the fear and anger of the Jewish Sanhedrin is aroused by way of persecution as the multitudes hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But this very persecution was necessary and was used by the Lord to send the apostles and ministers out from the comfortable confines of Jerusalem, into Judea, into Samaria, and into the uttermost parts of the earth to be faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ (just as Jesus had declared to them before His ascension in Acts 1:8).

You see, dear ones, those early Christians could not rest their hope and joy in the present blessings they were experiencing upon and immediately following the Day of Pentecost (and neither can we). The Lord is showing to us that our hope and joy are not in the present blessings of this life, but are in Christ (whether in times of blessing or in times of sorrow, in heartache, in physical affliction, in trial of faith, or in persecution). Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Let us consider together the wondrous miracle of healing Jesus performed through His apostles in our text that led to the persecution to follow in Acts 4-5. The main points of the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Glorious Healing of the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-8); (2) The Amazement of the Crowd to this Miracle (Acts 3:9-11).

I. The Glorious Healing of the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-8).

A. Peter and John, the same two disciples of Christ that ran together to view the empty tomb of the resurrected Jesus, now appear together approaching the temple at a time of the day in which a multitude of people would be present—the afternoon hour of prayer (the ninth hour=3 p.m.). And as they do so, there at the glorious gate called "Beautiful" was sitting a "certain man" lame from birth begging for alms. Let us consider this man and his condition briefly before moving on.

1. This poor man was lame from birth—he had never taken a step in his whole life (how thankful are we for the gracious ability to walk).

a. He was totally dependent upon others to carry him from one location to another

location. He had a voice to cry for help, but could not use that voice unless he was at such a place where his voice could be heard. His condition is similar in this respect to the paralytic that was carried by four friends to Jesus and let down through a roof because the house he was in was so crowded.

b. His only means of support was in begging and falling upon the mercy and charity of others. Whether he had a family or not, we are not told. But this was his daily life. Crying out to people to have mercy upon him and appealing to their charitable gifts (Acts 3:2).

c. This lame man was 40 years old (Acts 4:22), meaning that begging had been his lot in life for at least 20 years (if not from his childhood). There was no government assistance for the lame. There were no wheelchairs (or now motorized wheel chairs). Apparently, he was not even able to get around on crutches, but had to be carried. Perhaps he could not even put any weight at all on his feet and ankles (which appear to be where the healing occurred, Acts 3:7).

2. This lame man was of some degree of notoriety, for he is identified as a “certain” man lame from his mother’s womb (Acts 3:2). He was not just a lame man in general, but a “certain” man in particular. His notoriety is further made known by what is stated after his healing (Acts 3:10).

a. Apparently, this was something this poor lame man had done for a long time at that same location of the temple. He was no newcomer, but a common fixture for all Jews who frequented the temple (particular at this hour of prayer).

b. We find helpless beggars at the following locations in the New Testament: (1) at a rich man's gate—the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19ff); (2) along a main highway through a city—blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46ff); and (3) at the temple (Acts 3:1-11). In each of these cases, there were such disabilities that these beggars were unable to provide for their own needs. The fact that this lame man was a regular fixture at the temple would indicate that there was mercy being shown to him, otherwise he would likely have found a different location.

3. Here’s a question for you. Why did the Lord delay in healing this poor man until that particular afternoon? Why did this lame man have to continue in this painful, helpless, needy condition for all of those hard, difficult, trying years? Moreover, it is likely that was not the first time that Peter and John had seen this lame man, for it was their regular practice to frequent the temple at these times of prayer (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 2:46). So why did Peter and John not heal this man on a previous occasion? Why delay even one moment the healing of one so needy when the opportunity was there and when the divine intention to heal was known to God from eternity? Why was he even born lame? He was just an infant while yet in the womb when this affliction struck him?

a. I am reminded of the words of Jesus (in John 9) when He came upon a man who was born blind and His disciples asked Him, who had sinned that he was born blind, the man or the parents: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). The man born blind and the man born lame were not healed (though they may have prayed many times for such a healing throughout their lives) until that precise time that God had appointed in which to glorify Himself through His miraculous works.

b. Dear ones, here is a lesson for all of us. Waiting for God’s right time to heal us is God’s right and God’s business (Luke 4:25-27; 2 Timothy 4:20; Psalm 119: 67,71,75; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Our duty and our business is to repent of our sin, to walk in faith and loving obedience to His will, and always to look to Him who is able to heal a broken marriage, to heal a broken life, to heal an addiction (whether drugs, alcohol, sex, food, money, fashion, body, self, etc.), to heal your joblessness, to heal your singleness, to heal your chronic pain and disease. Will you submit to God’s timetable or to God’s will and love Him and serve Him with all of your heart whether he brings full and complete healing in your life at this time or not? That is the heart that God desires and loves to see in His dear children. It is the heart of Jesus Christ when He faced suffering as now man has ever suffered submitted Himself to the will of God and prayed: “Not my will, but

thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

c. There is coming a time, dear Christian, when all grief, sorrow, and tears, all physical and emotional pain, heartache, and death, all sin and temptation will be forever gone, and we will be perfectly conformed to the image of our Prophet, Priest, and King in both body and soul. That is your hope and reason why you can rejoice in trials.

B. Now let us consider for briefly the miracle that the Lord Jesus wrought through His apostles, Peter and John, in healing this poor man lame from birth.

1. The lame man beholds Peter and John, and he asks them for alms (money). Peter and John stare at this poor lame man, and command him to look at them, building in him a heightened expectation of charity, which the lame man did. He was only expecting something to meet his immediate need of food, clothing, and shelter. He was not expecting the healing of his body or the healing of his soul, but that is the nature of God’s free grace in Jesus Christ. He always gives to us what we do not deserve, and so often gives us what we do not even expect. We may think we only need this comfort or this need met (like this lame man did), and the love of God reaches into the bounty of the riches of His free grace and draws out a healing of our body, of our mind, of a relationship, of a heartache, of a painful memory, of an addiction, all because He can and all because He delights to give to us in love what we did not expect or deserve.

2. Peter no doubt surprises and perhaps momentarily disappoints the lame man when he says he doesn’t have any money to give to him. I probably would have thought, “Why are you mocking me, asking me to look on you, and then telling me you have no money for me.” But then Peter continues “but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk (Acts 3:6). Peter is saying, “By virtue of Christ’s power, mercy, and authority (not my own) rise up and walk.” This was not simply aping certain words as if they were magical (as we hear from various people on radio and TV who use “in Jesus name”). Peter and John were taking the spotlight off of themselves and placing it upon Christ and Christ alone. That is a good test to apply to so many who claim to perform miracles today (who receives the glory, honor, and praise, and how is the alleged miracle used to raise money).

3. This was a genuine miracle of healing that was wrought immediately before the eyes of all who knew this man to have been lame from birth. This was not a prearranged lie or deception. This was not taking some unknown person from the crowd who might claim he was healed of some unknown illness. I do not doubt at all that God can still heal miraculously when He chooses to do so, but I do doubt the claims of so many charlatans who are simply making a name for themselves, increasing their wealth, and leading so many souls away from the gospel of Jesus Christ. This miracle was performed in order to point this man and the multitude to their greater need of healing from sin which Peter preached in the remainder of Acts 3.

4. Observe that when Peter took the lame man by the hand and lifted him up that **immediately** his feet and ankles were healed (Acts 3:7). There was no process. There was no gradual healing (although God does heal gradually and by various means so many times in our lives). He had never walked, and yet had perfect balance, and without any physical therapy the bones and the muscles of the feet and ankles were made new, and he began leaping, jumping up and down, and walking perfectly without any help (Acts 3:8). Oh, what a sight to behold—this poor lame man jumping around the temple, praising God for His mercy and grace shown to him. What a scene this must have been!

a. Brothers and sisters, praising God is the essence of worship—worship is God-centered, God-directed, and God-appointed. You may be present for worship on the Lord’s Day. You may even participate in the singing of psalms, the reading of the Scripture, and the prayers offered to the Lord, but if your hearts are not lifted up to God and filled with praise to Him for His innumerable benefits of love, mercy, and grace in Christ Jesus to you, you have not truly worshipped the Lord.

b. How many times does God daily load us with His numerous benefits and yet we go about with long faces, feeling sorry for ourselves, wallowing in self-pity, rather than jumping and leaping

for joy over the mercy and grace of God shown to us every day?

c. And if we do not see these blessings as Christians, it is only because our eyes are fixed upon our troubles and upon ourselves, rather than fixed in faith upon Christ and His promises. God have mercy upon us. Can you imagine this man being healed, and then simply leaving and saying nothing, giving no praise or thanks to the Lord? And yet that is what we do daily when we will not see the mighty works of God in us and all around us, and praise our great God and Savior with thankful hearts.

II. The Amazement of the Crowd to this Miracle (Acts 3:9-11).

A. It could not be denied that God had just worked a miracle. And the reaction of the multitude in the temple was that “they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” because they knew this lame man (Acts 3:10). They all “ran together unto them” (Acts 3:11). They had to get a close up view as he jumped around praising God.

1. This is exactly what we should expect to hear and see in our lives and the lives of other brethren when the Lord performs His mighty deeds for us to behold. That is the chief purpose of the miracle—to produce awe and wonder at God’s power. Anything less simply shows how cold, indifferent, or dead we are to the power of God in healing the heart, the mind, the soul, the body, the marriage, the life of undeserving sinners (like you and me). We need to take time in the course of each and every day to be amazed by the greatness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are so distracted and preoccupied by our own business that we do not take the time to be overwhelmed by the love, the goodness, the mercy, the holiness, the power, the truth, the faithfulness, the patience, and the infiniteness of every attribute I have just mentioned.

2. Jesus Christ was declaring through this miracle that the messianic age had come, just as we read in Isaiah 35:3-6. This was the fulfillment of prophecy.

3. God used this miraculous sign to gather the crowd in utter amazement over what had happened and then Peter began to preach (as we shall see next Lord’s Day). That was the goal of this miraculous sign: to point people to their need of Jesus Christ who is able to heal the lame body, but especially able to heal the lame soul.

B. As I close, dear ones, I point you to Jesus Christ, the one who heals those who know they are spiritually lame, confess they are spiritually lame, and look to Christ alone to heal them of that spiritual lameness.

1. Your spiritual lameness before God has made you a beggar without a pure righteousness of which He will approve. His just punishment for your sin rests upon you all. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). You are completely bankrupt. You think that the things of this life will make you able to truly walk, run, and leap, but you see after gaining such earthly comforts, successes, and accomplishments how lame your life continues to be—you cannot leap for joy because you are yet lame before God until you are healed by Christ. The difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is between a sinner being lame from birth and unable to walk at all, and a sinner spraining an ankle (between being blind from birth and having poor eyesight, between being dead and being sick). You must understand that you cannot heal yourself—only Christ can heal you of your spiritual lameness, spiritual blindness, and spiritual death.

2. Dear friend, do you want to be healed that you might leap like the deer with joy and gladness for the eternal salvation of Jesus Christ? He says to you right now, “Rise up and walk!”

3. Dear brother or sister, have you forgotten how Jesus Christ has healed you of your spiritual lameness and has granted to you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places? Have you become cold and indifferent to the glory of God’s wonders in your life and in the history of the church in preserving and protecting His people, and in judging His enemies?

4. Peter took the lame man by the right hand and lifted him up (Acts 3:7). The power that healed was that of the Lord Jesus, but the hand that was the means to that healing was that of Peter. Peter who had denied the Lord three times is now used to lift up lame sinners by the power of Christ. Will you turn from your own selfishness and self-centeredness to being one who lifts up sinners, who lifts up brothers and sisters by the power of Jesus Christ? May the Lord use us all to lift up others to the glory of Jesus Christ, rather than pushing them down?

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