

Well, I have seen them, and I'm sure that you've seen them, too. Maybe you've even engaged them in conversation. Or maybe you've offered to them something from your purse or your wallet. They're actually usually quietly stationed near the traffic intersections where we do our shopping, sometimes with a tattered cardboard sign that tries to succinctly describe their situation in order that those who see them might really see them, and perchance offer them something. Something to get them through the rest of the day, if possible, or even better, through tomorrow. There's no way to really tell at a quick glance exactly what the life circumstances are for those who beg from others, but I'm sure that you've seen them before. I've seen them.

And what we have in Acts 3 today is an encounter with two followers of Christ and a beggar. It's an encounter that we might have. There are some characteristics of this encounter that are for us as well today in 2014. And there are some characteristics of this encounter that aren't for us today. Peter and John are heading up to the Temple. They encounter this beggar. This encounter gathers a crowd and Peter takes that opportunity to preach and make a call to those in the crowd to repent of their sins, to trust Christ for forgiveness of sins, and to call on the name that is above every name, even Jesus Christ our Lord. It's what Peter was living out, what Jesus had said in Luke 24: Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name should be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You, Jesus said, are my witnesses of these things. That's what Peter is living out in this passage.

So I want to read from Acts 3. I want to read all of Acts 3. I've taken the New Living translation, and I've used some of the language from the ESV to make it a little more readable in the narrative, kind of, style. So hear God's Word for us today. Acts 3.

Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money. Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk!" Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. He leaped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded at what had happened to the man! They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John. Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "Men of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? For it is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and instead demanded the release of a murderer. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!

Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes. Brothers, I realize that what you and your

leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. Therefore repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. Moses said, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. Listen carefully to everything he tells you. And every soul that will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God’s people and destroyed.’ Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, ‘Through your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways.”

Let’s pray together. Gracious Heavenly Father, we ask now that as we look into your Word that your Holy Spirit would use this time, Lord, to show us more of who you are, to reveal your power and your glory, to make us people who are passionate about the honoring of the name of Jesus Christ. Lord, make us your people, children of the covenant, spiritual descendants of Abraham. Make us to know that for sure today. And where there are some, Lord, here that don’t, I pray that you would do that work that only you can do. We’ll trust you with all of this. In the name of Jesus we pray it. Amen. Amen? Amen.

We have the whole of chapter three before us. I will spend of good portion of the message on the first point, but I’ve split it into three points. We see this encounter with Peter and John, this compassionate care that they conveyed to this man in the name of Christ. And then the crowd that gathers causes Peter to realize maybe this is why they got out of bed that morning. So he gives this reasoned response to the change that the people have seen take place in this man. He walks them through what they’re supposed to probably already be aware of, because they were the Jewish ones, they were the ones who studied the Old Testament. Then the third section that we’ll look at is that he, Peter, doesn’t waste that opportunity, but he calls them to confess Christ, the Christ of the covenant. He calls them to believe, to follow Jesus, to be witnesses of the resurrected Savior, as well.

So we see the compassionate care that these two men are conveying in the name of Jesus Christ. The way that the text reads, as Luke records for us, gives us a lot of detail. It’s filled with information that helps us to see the picture more clearly. It probably was the regular practice for Peter and John to go up to the Temple. In the early days of the Christian church the Jewish converts to Christianity probably still went to the Temple. They didn’t go to make a sacrifice. They probably went, however, to make contact—to make contact with their Jewish brothers, to tell them about the Messiah. They had walked with the resurrected Lord, the one who had fulfilled all of the covenant requirements, and they wanted people to know that.

So here they are, about the ninth hour of the day, about three o’clock in the afternoon—probably the most crowded time in the Temple because it was the time for the evening sacrifice. Peter and John started out, maybe simply because that would be the biggest crowd to share with. And as they head from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the Jews—the Temple was divided in many sections—they entered or were passing through the Gate Beautiful the Beautiful Gate. Luke tells us that during the busiest time of the day, here is this man who’s been unable to walk since he was born—a congenital defect, from birth. This man has never stood on his own two feet, never walked by his own strength. He’s been brought by some others, and laid at the gate, and apparently that was his daily experience. He was completely at the mercy of others. He was completely at the mercy of those who would carry him to drop him off at the beginning of the day, and come later on, he was at the mercy of those who would come in the evening and take him back to where he laid his head for rest at night. He was completely at the mercy of any and all who walk past the place for their

assistance, whatever they might be pleased to offer to him. But above and beyond all he was at the mercy of the sovereign God who ordained that he be born lame and unable to fend for himself. Up until that moment that was this man's experience.

So here he was laid at the Gate Beautiful or the Beautiful Gate. We have in the Jewish historian Josephus's records the description of Herod's Temple that's in view here in this passage that Herod built lavish and ornate in order to show the opulence, the majesty of God. And in the Beautiful Gate there was a huge bronze door, heavy. It took several men to open and close it, and it was laid with silver and with gold in order to decorate it. So here's this lame beggar laid at the entrance to Gate Beautiful begging for some thing to fall from the pockets of those going to offer their sacrifice in the Temple. You see the scene? You can picture this. Two respectable Jewish men, Peter and John, walking up to the Temple, and the beggar sees them. And probably as was his practice thousands of times before that point, he probably extended his hand, but Luke records that he didn't look at them. From this humiliated posture of a life filled with begging he just simply said, 'Alms? Do you have anything for me?' Maybe he didn't utter any words at all. Luke doesn't record.

But Peter and John stop. They're aware of this man. Here this one, he's humiliated himself, asking something for nothing. He would like some money that he has not earned, that he cannot pay back. He's at their mercy. Notice Peter and John's compassion. Peter and John, the ones who've walked with Jesus. They'd seen their Lord do this time and time and time again. Jesus regarded the woman who grabbed the hem of his garment, caused healing power to leave. And he stopped the crowd that day and he turned to her and he addressed her. At the home of Simon the Pharisee when the woman anointed Jesus's feet with her tears, he rebuked the Pharisees for not greeting him with kisses, and then he turns to the woman and he comforts her with the knowledge that she is forgiven, displayed by her worship. Jesus regarded people. He looked on them. And Peter and John do no different.

They gaze intently at the beggar. They look intently at him. I don't know how long they looked at him. I don't know what was going on in their hearts as they were looking at him. We don't know that. Luke doesn't give us that. He doesn't give us insight into their heart or what they were thinking. But we know that they paused and we know that they stared, and in that moment the compassion of Christ welling up within them. But Peter's not content for that man to simply look away. He wants that man to know who's there. So he says, 'Look at us.' Look at us. Look up here. It's okay. It's okay for you to make eye contact with me, as if Peter is saying, man, we're all in the same boat. I'm at the mercy of Almighty God for every good gift that comes my way. Peter is probably conveying that: 'Look at us.' You can look at me. Make eye contact. We're on the same plane.

And so the man looks. Luke records that he looks up. He fixes his eyes on them, Luke says. Why not? He'll comply. Here's a couple of guys. Alms? Alms for the poor? Look at us. So I'll comply. I'll look. If it means I get something that could get me through the rest of this day, I'll look up at you. He expected some money. He expected some small token, perhaps. I don't know. Then there in the Gate Beautiful with the ornate silver and the gold over these bronze heavy doors, Peter says that famous line: I have no silver or gold for you. He's looking right in the guy's eyes. But what I do have for you, I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

Just for a moment think about that man's reaction to that sentence. Just for a moment. For a brief nanosecond I wonder if he thought, What? No money? No temporary fix for me? Do you think this is some kind of joke? This is my only livelihood. My heart operates like that all the time. Lord, if I could just get my head above water, if I can just feel a little temporary relief from the trials of this world, if I could just kind of have ease for this day and maybe tomorrow--give me a good week. But God wants so much more for each of us. God wanted so much more for that lame beggar, laid at the Gate Beautiful. So much more than a

temporary fix or relief from life's trouble. What he wanted was *treasure*. What Peter and John wanted to offer him was TREASURE: Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Peter doesn't leave him to wonder very long. It's not a long drawn-out thing where you have to go away and take intermission. It's like that.

Peter takes him by the right hand. He raises him up, and immediately his feet and his ankles were made strong. You see that same thing in the passage that Dick read for us from Mark's gospel: immediately, instantly. That's how God works his miracles. That's how these things take place. This man who had never stood on his own two feet, who had never experienced what it was to stand tall, he had never walked before that moment---this man was healed. God had worked a miracle. He had worked that miracle through Peter, but a miracle nonetheless.

So before we go any further, let me say a couple of things about miracles, just so that we're all clear. Because we read Scripture like this and we get oppressed. There are all kinds of voices out there in the world that will oppress us. What's wrong with your faith? How come you're not going down to Howard County General walking up and down the halls and healing people in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth? There's something wrong with your faith; it's deficient.

We say it this way. A miracle occurs whenever God Almighty chooses to interject himself into human history and accomplish something supernaturally that would not otherwise naturally occur. That's a miracle. And it has no time frame on it. God is in the miracle business. He does whatever God pleases. Nothing I say in the following sentences should be taken away from here as a limiting of God, as if we could even do that. We can't limit Almighty God. God is free to do what he pleases, when he pleases to do it, and how he is pleased to accomplish whatever it is pleasing for him to do. Because he's God. We all believe that, amen?

I learned something when I was going to seminary to help me read passages like this. The question is not whether or not God can still do miracles. I believe that every time a sinner has the eyes of his faith opened to see his need for Christ, and his heart is regenerated by the Spirit of God, and he starts to walk in obedience and faith, and follows Christ all the days of his life, a miracle has taken place in that. We pray for miracles all the time. We get prayer lists in this church and e-mail, and our friends say please pray for me in this, and we've already done it today in this service. We pray that God would heal people. We pray that God would save people. We pray that God would do what only God can do. There's no limit to God's power. The question is not whether or not God can still work miracles today. Rather, the question for us when we read passages like Acts 3 is whether miracles are supposed to be the norm, the normative practice for the church still today. Should we expect to see all that we read about here occurring as a part of our regular practice, as we live out our faith in Christ?

My respectfully submitted answer to that question is no. We should not. And it's based on the Word of God. It's not based on my experience. Instead of seeing the early church as a miracle-working church, as some are in the habit of saying---mostly on TV---I think it's more helpful to see the early church as a church with miracle-working apostles, as some have said. I'm of the school of thought that teaches that miracles we read about in the Bible primarily occurred during three distinct periods of time. The time of Moses and his successor Joshua, the time of Elijah and his successor Elisha, and the time of Jesus Christ and his successors the apostles. If you think about it in those terms, you can see the way that God works things out. You can't escape the numerous examples of the miraculous occurring in those brief time periods, each about a hundred years or so. Three time periods. We don't have a lot of time to unpack this concept here, but if you look at the Old and the New Testament occurrences of miracles, a couple of common things come out. It's when God establishes a new revelation of himself, a new era of revelation. When God gave the law through Moses and then through Joshua, it was a new revelation of himself to mankind. When God spoke through the prophets, he begins through Elijah, and you see all the miracles that Elijah brings forth---and then Elisha, same kind of thing. God is

authenticating the messenger of this new era of revelation. They speak for him, and the miracles authenticate that they speak for him. They indicate beyond a reasonable doubt that there's a new era of revelation taking place, and they're supposed to draw attention to the witness of the miracle, to hear the new revelation. When these things occur crowds gather. It becomes well known that God is at work. What is he saying that's new through the law, through the prophets, through Christ.

That's what Hebrews 1 is about. In the olden days in diverse ways God spoke, but now he has spoken once and for all through his Son Jesus Christ and the revelation of him in and through the Gospels and the New Testament. We join with some of the heroes of our faith. Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians 4, he says this: In the early church the Holy Spirit was sent forth in visible form. This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to establish the early church, as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once the church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearances of the Holy Ghost ceased. John Calvin says in his commentary on the Gospels: Though Christ does not expressly state whether he intends this gift of miracles to be temporary or to remain perpetually in the church, yet it is more probable that miracles were promised only for a time in order to give luster to the gospel while it was new or in the state of obscurity that it was in. The gift of healing, like the rest of miracles which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the gospel marvelous forever---John Calvin. Jonathan Edwards, in his book *Charity and its Fruit* says this: Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world. But since the canon of the Scriptures has been completed and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased. You see, God was establishing in Christ and through the apostles a new era of revelation, but it was the new era of revelation that would be the final Word that God would give to mankind. That's why we preach the Word, we study the Word, we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching--because they represented Christ, they spoke for him in a prophetic way.

So let's get back to the miraculous. Here is the formerly lame-from-birth beggar, standing on his own two feet. Do you see the picture? He doesn't just kind of creak up and try to make his way. That's not why Peter reached forth his hand. He needed no physical rehab. He needed no six weeks of exercises to figure this thing out. Luke records that he leapt up, and he began leaping and walking and praising God. In fact, verse 8 says: And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and he entered the Temple with them walking and leaping and praising God. Two uses of the word 'leaping.' He's really causing a commotion here. He's like a kid with a new toy. I got new guitar this week. Yeah. I'll tell you the story later if you're interested. When it arrived Thursday night I made my family sick of guitar sounds. I played it until---in fact, after everybody went to bed. And they asked me if I was taking it to work with me Friday, and I said no, that's not a good, wise thing to do. I will not get any work done. This man with these new strong ankles and legs, man, he's like, he can't contain himself. And in the words of my southern belle mother, 'He's causin' quite a scene.'

And the crowd, in verse 9, the crowd recognizes, there's something happening over here that is extraordinary. There's something happening by those two guys that is extra-ordinary. Let's go see what it is. The people saw walking and praising God. They recognized him, verse 9 says, as the former lame beggar who had been lame since birth and they were filled with wonder and amazement. He was clinging to Peter and John. He wouldn't let go of them. He was closely associated with these two guys. And Peter recognized, now the crowd has gathered. Maybe Peter's thinking, maybe: John, this is why we got up this morning. John, this is what we were praying about. We didn't know what God had in store, but look at what God had in store! This huge crowd gathers. A crowd of Jewish people, Jewish brothers. And Peter takes that opportunity to give a reasoned response to the God-wrought change that those people have witnessed now.

Peter addresses the crowd, his brothers. Here's a Jewish man, Peter, addressing the Jews in the crowd, saying: Brothers, why are you amazed at this? Listen, Peter says. If John and I were able to do this with our power and

our piety, with our godliness, that would be extraordinary. But God does stuff like this all the time! This is not because of Peter and John. It's by the power and the authority of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We are his witnesses. Peter once again makes a straight line connection between the Law of Moses, the prophets, and all that pointed to Jesus Christ as God's Messiah. Those Jews standing there, they needed to know what Peter had within him. Jesus is Messiah. There is no more revelation after Christ. This is when you need to grasp this, brothers. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and the God of our fathers---he is validating the suffering servant that you heard prophesied through Isaiah in your presence today. This guy that's clinging to us, he's evidence of that. In Isaiah 35, in verses 5 and 6, the times of God's Messiah would be marked by miracles. Listen to the prophet. He says: The eyes of the blind will be open, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the tongue of the mute will be loosened to sing for joy, and the lame will leap like the deer. And that's what was going on! And Peter's trying to point that out to them. Peter brings the Jewish listeners to see God's Messiah is Jesus Christ.

And then he starts to go through the various names. In verse 13 Jesus is the suffering servant of Isaiah 52 and 53. He bears our griefs, he carries our sorrows. He was stricken, smitten of God, afflicted. He was pierced for our sins and crushed for our iniquities. That would be very familiar to those Jews---he's the suffering servant that Isaiah spoke of. The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom. Peter says that his name is Jesus, Yeshua. He was given the name Jesus, because he would deliver. He would save his people from their sins. He's the Holy and Righteous One. He's God's perfect man to fulfill all of God's extraordinary requirements of the covenant. Jesus is the Holy and the Righteous One.

And Peter points out, he's the Prince of life, but you, you in the crowd, you Jewish brothers, you put the Prince of life to death. When Pilate was ready to release him, you yelled all the louder, give us Barabbas, and crucify Christ. You put the Prince of life on the cross. But God raised him from the dead. And we, Peter says, we're witnesses to that fact. We invite you to be witnesses as well. Come on, brothers. We point others to him, Peter's saying. We aren't the priority here for you. He is. We're simply beggars ourselves, spiritually speaking. We're totally bankrupt of anything righteous. God saved us by his grace. This is all a part of this. The leaping and praising and walking around strong former lame beggar was healed on basis of the faith in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, God's appointed Messiah. And there won't be somebody after him. This is pressing, brothers. This is the only name---in chapter 4, we see next week---this is the only name by which any man can be saved.

It's the quintessential one-two punch of the gospel. Peter has just told his crowd that they crucified the Prince of life. And then he says: Brothers, I know that you and your rulers, you did this out of ignorance. You did this out of ignorance. Jesus on the cross said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. Paul picks up this same theme in 1 Corinthians 2:8, when he's talking about the wisdom of God revealed through Christ's sacrifice. He says none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So Peter says, I know that you were ignorant of who Christ was. But Peter is saying to them, you heard this message foretold. I'm telling you that this message is being fulfilled, has been fulfilled in Christ, and now I'm calling you to follow Christ with us.

In Matthew 17 we read that scene where Jesus and Peter and John and James go up on a high mountain, and before them, in their presence, Jesus is transfigured. He appears as one who is a heavenly being. His face shines with a brilliant light, his clothes are white as light, and he's transfigured before Peter and James and John. And standing with him are Moses and Elijah. Do you see the theme here, if you will. Moses, through whom God revealed the Law, and Elijah, through whom the prophets began and sprung from, and Jesus, that final era of revelation. And while he was transfigured before them, Matthew 17:5 records, a voice spoke from heaven and said, 'Behold, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!' And Peter says to the crowd that day, in verse 22 he says: Moses said, the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me

from your brothers. And you shall listen to him in whatever he tells you to do. Peter is saying believe in Christ, trust Christ, and enjoy the times of refreshing that come as the generous and gracious benefits of the covenant that God has established. That's the sermon that Peter was preaching.

He says, however, if you reject him, there is no plan B. There's nothing to follow after this final revelation of God in Christ. Reject him, brothers, and you'll be cut off from the covenant and ultimately destroyed. Peter was calling them to repent. Peter says the miracle you witnessed today in this beggar was done in Jesus' name. It's to establish that we are witnesses of Jesus. He's the one that God tells you to listen to---Jesus. Listen to Jesus, turn to Jesus. He has fulfilled the covenant requirements on your behalf. And every one of us, every preacher who assumes the pulpit and every believer who proclaims Christ, we take up the role of Peter. That's where it's the same. We preach Christ and him crucified for sinners. We don't go to Howard County, walk up and down the hallways, and grab people by the hand, ripping them up out of their wheelchairs. We preach forgiveness for sins. It's never too late to repent. In fact, Peter says do this, that your sins may be blotted out, that your record may be wiped clean, washed clean by the blood that Jesus Christ shed. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Colossians 2:14, we read that on the cross Christ canceled the record of our sin debt that stood against us with its legal demands. If we're not covered by Christ's sacrifice, then we stand uncovered with our sin still intact before God. But Christ has accomplished the canceling of our debt---wiped clean.

In just a moment we're going to sing these words: *No guilt in life, no fear in death. For this is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand. Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.* My only hope is that Christ's righteousness is my righteousness. My only hope is that the forgiveness for my sins is found in Christ's sacrifice on my behalf. And that, beloved, is your only hope as well.

Let's pray together. Gracious God, please make us assured and confident witnesses of you, Lord Jesus. And make us, Lord, people that are leaping and praising and standing in the grace that you've provided us to stand in. That we would know without any doubt that we belong to you, that you are our God and we are your people. And I do pray, Lord, for any that have come today to visit church or to be a regular part of this service, and they don't know you in that way. I pray, Lord, that you would do that work that only you can do, even now in this moment. And help us, those of us who know you, to help those who call on your name today to walk closely with you all the days of their life. We trust you. We give you these requests in the name of Christ. Amen.