

Good morning! Our Scripture for today is in Acts 3, but let's begin with a quick review. After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up and gave a bold message proclaiming the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus. In response to Peter's sermon, over three thousand were baptized and from that time on new believers joined the church daily. **Acts 2:46** tells us, **"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."** As we can see in this verse, in the early days of the church, they had home fellowship meetings with shared meals and they also met daily in the temple.

Meetings at the temple for prayer, worship, and teaching were probably a regular part of the life of the Jerusalem church for many years. This should not surprise us because the disciples did not see themselves as leaving the Jewish faith to start a new religion. Rather, they saw their faith in Jesus as the completion of their Jewish faith. For many centuries, the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah to appear, in recognizing Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah that the prophets had spoken of so frequently, the disciples found completion. The prophecies had been fulfilled. The Messiah had come, and, as the disciples gradually understood, Jesus the Messiah was the Savior not only for the Jews, but also for the gentiles.



Later, in **1 Corinthians 3:16**, Paul challenged the church in Corinth saying, **"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"** When we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in our heart. And, since the Spirit of God lives in us, we are temples of the Lord, and therefore the temple in Jerusalem is no longer necessary. However, for a time, it was still useful, and God allowed it to remain. But by 70 AD, the temple was no longer useful for God's plan and God allowed the Roman armies to destroy it.

Today, if you go to Jerusalem, you will see that the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock and also the Al Aqsa Mosque sit on top of the ancient temple mount. Conservative Bible scholars generally believe that the end times prophecies require that the Jewish temple be rebuilt and Ezekiel 40-47 is often mentioned as the blueprint for the rebuilt temple. Obviously, there are political and religious issues between the Muslims and the Jews that would make any attempt to rebuild the Jewish temple difficult. Yet, if that is God's plan, then it will certainly happen. But, let's leave that discussion for another time and move on to our Scripture for today. Let's read Acts 3:1-10.



I. Scripture Acts 3:1-10 (NIV 1984)

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

II. Teaching

In Acts 2, the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit and **Acts 2:43**, records that, **“Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”** Now, in Acts 3, we are given a detailed account of one of those miraculous signs. Let’s take a closer look.

Acts 3:1, “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon.” This is one of many places where we see Peter and John together and I think it is a blessing to see friends working together to serve the Lord. From Luke 5:10, we know that Peter and John had been partners in the fishing business on Lake Galilee before they became disciples of Jesus. Since that time they had come a long ways on an amazing journey with Jesus. They were with Him when He preached and did miracles, they were nearby when He was crucified, and they were among the first to visit the tomb after the resurrection.

Take a look at **John 20:3-4**, after Mary Magdalene told the disciples that the tomb of Jesus was empty, it says, **“So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.”** Who is this, “other disciple?” Bible scholars agree that it is John. Peter and John had already travelled a long way together. Now, in today’s passage, we are beginning to see how they are embarking on a new chapter in their journey of faith and ministry.

Acts 3:2, “Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.” From Acts 4:22, we know that this man was over 40 years old. He had been crippled since birth and it is likely that begging was the only work he had ever known. Sitting at the temple gate and begging was this man’s way of making a living and, since he had sat in the same prominent location for many years, everyone who visited the temple regularly knew him.

During His ministry, Jesus also went to the temple often and Jesus also must have seen this man. This raises a question, why didn’t Jesus heal this man months or years earlier? When we think about questions like this, we can learn an important lesson. In God’s perfect plan, His timing is just as important as His will. We often feel that God should solve our problems immediately. And we sometimes use the Scriptures to show that it is certainly God’s will to bring healing and blessing to His people. But in our prayers, the issue of God’s timing is often forgotten. We don’t always understand God’s timing, but we would do well to trust in His timing always. God is never early and He is never late. God always has perfect timing.



The beggar sat at the temple gate every day for years. Just like many modern beggars, he would have watched the crowd and occasionally cried out asking for mercy, begging for a few coins. It was not a desirable way to make a living. But apparently it worked; otherwise he would not have continued coming and begging for so long. He had friends or family who carried him to the spot each day and he had food to eat. He was getting by, but it was not a lifestyle that many people would envy.

Then one day, Peter and John came and insisted that he look at them. Expectation began to rise in the man’s heart; surely these two people who demanded his attention like this would give him something good. Maybe they would give him some choice food. Or maybe even a gold coin. But what happened next? God’s perfect time for the beggar to receive a wonderful blessing had come. **Acts 3:6, “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’”** Then Peter took his hand and helped him up, and suddenly his feet and ankles were strong and for the first time in his life his legs supported him and he stood and began to walk. He began to jump. He opened his mouth and praised God.

Noelle painted the scene like this. Peter and John stand on each side smiling as the ragged beggar rejoices before God. God has healed him. For the first time, his body is whole and strong. Angels above join the celebration and the bright sun signals that a new day has come for this man. There is great cause for rejoicing. After this the man goes through the gate called Beautiful and into the temple courts, and all of the people recognize him as the man who had been begging at the gate for many years.



It is easy for us, as modern readers, to miss the significance of this moment. The man had always begged outside the gate; he probably was not allowed to go inside because the culture at that time discriminated against those who were handicapped. It was widely believed at that time that handicaps and sickness came from sin, so the man would have been thought of as an unclean sinner, not worthy to enter the temple gate. But, after he was healed, no one could deny the man entry and he went into the temple courts, and, no doubt, on into the temple itself. Scholars have not come to agreement about exactly which gate it was, but some scholars think it must have been the Nicanor Gate, because it was said to be especially magnificent and might easily have been nicknamed the, “Beautiful Gate.”



Regardless of which gate it was, the man went in joyfully. **Acts 3:8, “He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”** This man had hoped to receive something from Peter and John, but what he actually received was far beyond any blessing he had imagined. He had received physical healing, but even more, he had received acceptance in society and among his people. But the greatest gift of all was something far better than even this.

The healing proved that God had accepted him and forgiven any sin that he might have had. How did this happen? Let’s look at **Acts 3:6**, one more time, **“Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’”** Peter’s pockets were empty. This doesn’t mean that Peter was completely broke; after all, Acts 2:44-45 tells us the disciples shared everything and that none were in need. But apparently Peter didn’t have any money with him on that day. Perhaps it was that very fact that God used to speak to Peter about healing the man. Peter must have seen the crippled man before, and perhaps on other days Peter gave him a coin or two. But on this day, Peter, led by the Holy Spirit, knew that God’s perfect timing had come for this man to be healed.

Peter obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit and commanded the man, **“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”** Peter was not acting on his own initiative; he was obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit and acting, **“In the Name of Jesus.”** When Peter said this, he was proclaiming that he is acting as Jesus’ representative. It is Jesus who brought healing to the man. And not just healing of the man’s body; Jesus brought spiritual healing as well, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Don’t miss the importance of this of speaking in the Name of Jesus. As Christians, we are all called to do good works and to serve and bless others. But if we do it in our own name, then it is worthless to the Kingdom of God. We are not called to minister in our own names. We are not called to minister in the name of some church or organization. We are not even called to minister in the Name of God - that is good, but by itself it is not enough. As Christians, we are called to minister in the Name of Jesus, and we need to remember to always make that clear. People need to know that it is all about Jesus.



When Peter was questioned before the Jewish authorities, if he had simply said that God healed the man, they would have been happy. But Peter knew that he had to make it very clear that the healing was done

in the Name of Jesus. We are jumping ahead a bit, but take a look at **Acts 4:8-12**, “**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**”

That’s pretty clear. It is all about Jesus. Jesus alone is Lord. Apart from Jesus, there is no salvation. Brothers and sisters, we need to remember that ministry that does not glorify the Name of Jesus is not Christian ministry. Around the world there are many Christians who seem to think that just living a good life and helping others is their witness to the world. But if we do not speak the Name of Jesus, how will people know the reason for our good works? If you do good works and give to the poor without speaking the Name of Jesus, people will simply think that you are a very nice person. Then you will get the honor and thanks instead of Jesus. That is not Christian ministry. Christian ministry brings glory and honor to Jesus, not to us.

There is a well-known quote which is said to be from Francis of Assisi that is loved by millions. “*Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.*” This quote is sometimes used to defend a ministry of good works without words. But we should remember that Francis himself used a great many words in his preaching, and when he did not use words, it was most likely in a context where everyone knew he was serving others in the Name of Jesus. Perhaps if we all dressed like monks and carried large crosses then people would understand without words that we serve in the Name of Jesus, but otherwise, they will not know unless we tell them.



III. Conclusion

Peter and John boldly proclaimed the Name of Jesus. Let’s learn to do the same. But the truth is, sometimes it seems like we have more in common with the crippled man than we do with Peter and John. Many of us carry old wounds and injuries that have handicapped us in our service to the Lord. Usually these are emotional and spiritual burdens, not physical infirmities. But whatever your burden may be, if something is holding you down and preventing you from freely walking with the Lord and joyously entering into His presence, I want to encourage you to turn that burden over to the Lord today and receive healing. Even Peter was once deep in deep despair because he had denied the Lord. But Jesus healed him and restored him. And in today’s passage, on that day at the temple, a renewed Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was used mightily for Jesus’ glory.

Jesus can do the same for you. Whatever has happened in your life, whatever has hurt you or held you down. Jesus can heal you and set you free. In **John 8:31-32**, we read, “**To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”** If you want to be set free, turn to Jesus, trust in Jesus, cling to Jesus, follow Jesus and obey His word. And soon you will be dancing and witnessing to the goodness of our Lord Jesus. Let’s pray.

IV. Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, We give thanks to you for the wonders of your grace and mercy. Your love is perfect and eternal. Lord Jesus, at the cross you proved the wonders of your love when you gave your life as a ransom for ours, taking our sins unto yourself so that we might have forgiveness and abundant life. Help us to turn to you and receive the wonderful gift of salvation that you have bought for us with your own blood. Loving Lord, I pray that you would come and minister among us by your Holy Spirit today. Many of us are weary and burdened; come and set us free. Break the chains that bind your people, heal the sick and set the prisoners free. Pour out your love and grace in this place so that we might rejoice and give thanks for all of your wonderful works. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we might boldly minister in the Name of Jesus, the Name above all names. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.