

Acts 3 – Leadership that Lifts

When we met last week, we were in Acts 2 – and our passage ended with this report of the early Christians meeting together:

⁴⁶ Every day the believers continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

They loved meeting together. The end of chapter 2 says that the city was favorable to them, because there was something about their joy, their gratitude, their fellowship that was so attractive.

In chapter 3, we move from the work of God with the multitude, to the work of God with one person.

We see that one person's struggle is just as important to God as the struggle of the masses. God is not only interested in the amount of people we minister to – God is interested in the one.

John Maxwell: When you walk through a crowd, walk slowly.”

Stop! Look! Listen to the people God puts before you.

Chapter 3 – let's read

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

²Now a man who was lame 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.

(There's something that's been on my heart this week – when Peter and John went to the temple, they ran straight into an opportunity to bless someone who needed a blessing.

So let me say: “You’re being here, you’re being present, is something that’s so much bigger than you. We live in a culture that says, “If it doesn’t meet MY needs, my preferences, my likes, my sensibilities – then I won’t go up to the temple.”

But listen: your being here is so much bigger than you! (MAYBE YOU, LIKE ME, FALL INTO THAT TRAP SOMETIMES – AND I CAN TELL YOU, THAT’S NOT FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT, THAT FROM A SELFISH SPIRIT).

And when that hit me, I just prayed, “Lord, forgive me of seeing the church through the lens of what it can do for me.”

Because – like this man – there are people here in the temple, that need my presence. My input, my feedback, my smile, my hug, my encouragement.

And so – “One day” – they were going to the temple. And God put someone in their path that would create a story we'd be talking about 2000 years later

Listen – never underestimate that God can do miracles in the lives of people, but that can't happen unless you show up.

SO – here's this man, lame from birth – carried there daily to beg – for survival.

Verse 3 says - **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!”**

Now here's the thing: people have not changed much in 2000 years.

Here's a man who thinks that money is the solution to all his problems, so he's begging.

And most everyone in this moment is going to church, but nobody really pays him any mind. That is, until Peter and John come along, focus on the man, and say, “we see you – LOOK AT US!”

⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have . . . (which was true I’m sure – it’s like they look at the beggar and say, “Dude, we gave up our jobs to follow Jesus; we’re just as broke as you are.)

Peter and John don’t have any money – but what they do have is the Holy Spirit (which is comparatively so much more).

^{6b} – “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (It’s the first recorded miracle that happens after the resurrection of Christ).

⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they 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.

A couple of things:

1. Here’s a guy. He wasn’t looking for healing, he was looking for a handout. But when he met Peter and John, he received so much more.

Here’s what’s interesting – there is no indication that this man had faith whatsoever. (And sometimes people say, “Well, if you only had enough faith, then this or that.”)

The ones that had faith here – were the apostles.

And so, sometimes – you’re going to have to have enough faith for somebody around you.

It’s just like the story of the paralyzed man in Luke 5. He couldn’t get to Jesus because of the crowds, and so his friends lowered him down through the roof by ropes to get him to Jesus.

And do you know what it says?

When Jesus saw THEIR FAITH, he said, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus didn’t see “his faith.” He saw “their faith.”

My guess is there’s SOMEONE IN A TOUGH MOMENT WHO NEEDS YOUR faith and friendship to hold them up. Who is that person?

So here’s the lame man – he’s leaping, and jumping, and praising God (which is noted twice).

And because there were two men who SAW what others failed to see, a soul is saved – and where he was DESPAIRING, now he’s REJOICING.

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade (an area of the temple). ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?

Now he has their attention – and so he breaks open the truth they need to know:

¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

Here's what I see:

1. I love this – verse 12 – Peter says:

Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?

I love that because it wasn't the lame man's faith, it was Peter's faith that brought him healing, but even Peter doesn't take credit for it. He deflect the attention, the glory – from himself to Jesus His Lord.

Listen – real spiritual leadership is never about ourselves. The church does not exist because of our awesomeness! It exists for one reason and one reason along – because of the power and mercy of God! That's it.

True leaders never – they never make it about themselves. They're just always deflecting – the Glory belongs to Him!

2. Spiritual leaders are more aware of what they don't know than what they do.

Verse 17 - “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

You see the problem? The people had formed an opinion of Jesus based on what they had been taught, over and over again. And here's the thing – it was completely wrong. (At the end of the chapter he reeducates them - Abraham, Moses, Samuel, all the prophets foretold about these days).

They acted in ignorance. The thought they were doing the right thing, and they killed the Son of God. Why?

Because their mental model was all wrong.

Here's what this tells us – all of us have a responsibility, by reading the Scripture and through the conviction of the Holy Spirit – to evaluate our mental models.

Just because you heard it all your life – just because your preacher preached it week after week, just because it's what your parents told you – doesn't mean it was all wrong, but it also doesn't mean it was all right.

Listen (I heard this the other day) – if you're the kind of person who would say, “if you don't see it the way I do - you're going to hell,” you might want to check that. There can be a lot of pride and ignorance in blanket statements like that.

We don't need a haughty spirit, what we need is a humble spirit.

Someone told me this week – that at the production facility where he works, they have three criteria for hiring new employees. They're looking for these three things:

Humble – Hungry – and Smart

S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?"

Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst.

To her surprise, she received this letter from the college:

"Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

What we need are humble and hungry hearts. A humble spirit says:

I hope I'm right, but I may be wrong. (Listen – if you're always right in your own eyes, you've got some work to do." Peter says, "You thought you had it right, but you acted in ignorance."

And a hungry spirit says: "I have more to learn than I have to teach". SO – are you COACHABLE?

Later on in Acts we read:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

So we pray – "Lord, keep us humble, and keep us hungry."

The people thought they were right, and they were wrong, because they put Jesus on a Cross.

What, then, is the remedy? (Because all of us are guilty, all of us have gone astray, all of us have nailed Jesus to a tree):

Thankfully – Peter is a truth teller – a truth we desperately need to hear:

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

How beautiful!

You see – the story of the lame man speaks volumes in the present, but the story also points to the future.

Here's why: Peter says that the healing is a sign of the coming restoration of all things that God has promised.

(You see, the Jews would have recognized the healing of the lame man as the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:6, "Then shall the lame man leap like a deer.")

Isaiah explained that God would send a Messiah to purchase the healing of the whole world:

"... by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

This is what ignorant people missed: Jesus didn't come to bring a new form of **religion** where we talk about where "we're right"

and “everybody else is wrong,” he came to bring about a **revival** of the human heart, and hope for his people.

And so we see - through the work of Jesus, all the pain of the world would be reversed. Listen to these promises:

“The lion will lay down with the lamb . . . and the infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.”

“Look around you and see, for all your children will come back to you . . . they will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders” (Isaiah 11:6–9; 35:5–7; 49:18, 22).

You see – miracles were not simply magic shows to show how powerful God was. (If he wanted to do that, he could have written his name in the sky, picked up the Temple on his shoulders).

No – every miracle Jesus and the apostles did was an alleviation of suffering that pointed to God’s ultimate goal for you and me WHO SUFFER BECAUSE OF SIN AND BROKENNESS.

If miracles like this show us anything, they show us that God is NO HAPPIER with the world as it is than you and I are, that pain and disease are not natural.

Listen - God did not create the world with death and loss and sickness and guilt and shame – we did that! In the Garden, we chose self-will, we chose to go our own way – and leads to broken lives and broken promises and broken bodies and broken relationships.

But God comes along through the miracle of rebirth to say – God’s not done with us! That one day, he will restore things to the way they are supposed to be.

I love this:

“Miracles are not a suspension of the natural order, but a return to the natural order. Jesus’ healings are the only natural things in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded” (Tim Keller).

Listen – to those of you living with pain today, remember this: there is GREAT HOPE FOR YOU if you are in Jesus. What is seen is temporary, but what is to come is eternal.

Joni Eareckson Tada (incredible Christian speaker and writer, paralyzed in a diving accident as a teenager),

“At that great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the first thing I think I’ll do on resurrected legs is fall to my glorified knees and praise the God of Resurrection and healing, and then I’ll stand and dance before him with all my might.”

So as we end:

1. Who am I serving?

N.T. Wright said Christianity “flourishes best when the church gives itself to works of mercy and beauty.”

Who needs to just repent this morning – “Lord, forgive me – I’ve made it about me – but I’ve lost my way somewhere, I’ve lost the softness of my heart. I’ve stopped being coachable, I’ve been prideful and not humble.

Lord, somewhere along the way I’ve made it about what serves me instead of what serves you!

Lord – I repent of that Spirit. Lord, make me like Peter and John who walked slowly through the crowd, and saw people!

2. REPENT (Acts 3:19): Lord, where do I need to turn my life totally over to you? I’ve through about being a Christian, I’ve through about being baptized – but I’ve let the devil steal that good seed from my heart.

Lord, it’s time to step up, to move up – to get some things right!

We need something more than physical healing, something more than money, something more than great relationships. We need the restoration of God!

Pray –

Lord, if there is anyone here today who has not put their truth in you totally, I pray that today will be the day.