

THE HEALING LOVE OF JESUS

Acts 3

The River Team

READ: PETER HEALS THE LAME BEGGAR

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now 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. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 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.

LUKE DESCRIBES WHAT TOOK PLACE ON THIS REMARKABLE DAY AS EXPERIENCED BY:

1. The Apostles Peter and John
2. The ‘man who was lame from birth’
3. The ‘crowd’ on onlookers at the Temple.

PETER AND JOHN

After the day of Pentecost, the apostles performed ‘many signs and wonders’ and this is the first detailed account of one of these. Peter and John approach the temple for prayers and come upon a lame man.

The lame man saw Peter and John and asked for alms. Instead of alms, Peter looked at him intently and told him to look at them. The lame man did, still expecting alms. Undoubtedly, Peter’s response provided more ‘charity’ than the lame man expected. Peter took the man by his right hand and raised him up. Immediately strength entered the man’s limbs! One commentator says:

“Perhaps only medical men can fully appreciate the meaning of these words; they are peculiar, technical words of a medical man. The word translated feet is only used by Luke, and occurs nowhere else. It indicates his discrimination between different parts of the human heel. The phrase ankle-bones is again a medical phrase to be found nowhere else. The word ‘leaping up’ describes the coming suddenly into socket of something that was out of place, the articulation of a joint. This then is a very careful medical description of what happened in connection with this man.” - David Gusik

There is a clear link in Jesus’ teaching and ministry between praying for the sick and the God’s forgiveness of sin and restoration from sin’s effects. The un-named ‘man lame from birth’ stands in Luke’s account as a powerful and poignant symbol of the human condition. Each one of us is in this sense, ‘lame from birth’. Born with a sinful nature inherited from Adam, our bodies are subject to diseases and infirmities. Jesus died to forgive our sins and to put to death our old sinful nature.

Now we can understand why Jesus gave authority to his disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons as he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. With that authority they would rebuke and command diseases and demons to go in the name of Jesus Christ. Miracles would prove to the ‘lost’ that the power of sin and death have been broken through the Cross. They would prove that the kingdom of God was near, and that Jesus was the Messiah.

THE ‘MAN LAME FROM BIRTH’

In biblical times, the beggar represented one of the lowest, have-nots in society. A man unable to work, reduced to begging as his only hope for sustenance, was pitiable. The lame man begged from those entering the temple to worship and pray. Luke’s detailed description enhances our awareness. The man was lame “from birth,” carried “daily” and “placed” at the gate. He’d been needy all his life- at this time he is 40 years old. Who knows how many people walked by him without bothering to “see” him?

The lame man had been excluded from the Temple and all it symbolized in Israel: divine presence, sacrifices, atonement for sin. After his healing, the man enters the temple alongside Peter and John- fully restored to community.

THE CROWD

Like a child with a new toy, the ‘beggar’ could not resist using his new-found ability. His joy knew no bounds as he leapt up to his feet! These events can be seen to fulfil Isaiah’s prophetic vision of the coming of the Messiah:

“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” Isaiah 35: 5-6

The crowd on onlookers saw him walking and praising God! Then they realised that this was the man who had always sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. These people were filled with wonder and amazement. The sight of the once lame man walking and praising God was proof to all the people that he had been truly healed – we can imagine their sense of shock! He was such a well-known figure after his years of begging that there could be no doubt about his identity and therefore about the reality of his healing.

In Acts 3 .11 -13 our story continues as Peter addresses the crowd with the message of the gospel- telling them that Jesus, whom they had put to death, is the Messiah, whose power this miracle of healing demonstrates:

“While 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. 12 When 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? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.”

The Temple in Jerusalem, visible for miles around, excluded all Gentiles, gave restricted access to women, and probably prevented the lame, the blind, the physically impaired from access. This miracle at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple reveals that the new community being formed through the Messiah is offered to all- those in ‘the crowd’ that day are all invited into that community. God’s spirit, as Peter and John have demonstrated, no longer “dwells in temples made with human hands” (Acts 17) but indwells his new community by his Spirit.

FOR DISCUSSION

EXPECTATION:

The lame man received much more than the monetary donation he would have been satisfied with!

Many of us struggle to expect good things from God. What are we expecting from God is our life right now? Lisa Bevere writes: “Pray in a way that makes room for God’s answer to astound you!”

1. Share some things you have seen God do in answer to prayer.

HEALING THE SICK:

Jesus taught his disciples to heal the sick. Jesus commanded the twelve and then the seventy-two to heal the sick as they proclaimed the kingdom of God.

There is a story about a humble monk walking with a cardinal at a time when the church was at its zenith of power, prestige and wealth. The cardinal pointed to their opulent surroundings and said to the monk, “We no longer have to say, silver and gold I do not have.” The monk replied, “But neither can you say, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”

2. Relatively few believers heal the sick as Jesus taught his disciples. Why do we think this is? Discuss.

FOR PRAYER:

Share what needs in our own life we can be bringing to Jesus right now, and prayer for those needs.

