



# ACTS 3:1-10

## THE WITNESSING CHURCH

### I. Introduction

Greeting, welcome, introduce myself, get your eyes on the text: Acts 3

**Special Announcement:** Ronnie Goble will be here to preach on June 18. We believe in God's work through church planting and we believe that God has placed a call on Ronnie's life to plant. Two things for you to pray and think about...

1. How you might partner with the Gobles through prayer, giving, or going?
2. Who do you know in Southfield, Berkeley, Royal Oak, Oak Park, or Ferndale that you can connect with Ronnie?

### Series Recap:

Today we're continuing our series through the book of Acts. Acts is a historical account of God's work to plant his church. And because we - Christians today - are a part of the church (Big "C") that Jesus' planted, we see the church's history as important to us because where we come from shapes us. How we began should profoundly influence what we are like now. So one of the main questions we've been asking in this series is, *How does the testimony of the early church shape us as the church today?* Not only that, but we came to Acts 1:8 and saw that Jesus gave his disciples a mission: to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And so we've been looking at the story of the early church, knowing that their mission is our mission and asking, *How is Jesus calling us to be his witnesses here where he's placed us and to the end of the earth?*

We've walked through the mission Jesus gave and the ascension of Christ in chapter one, we've looked at the coming of the Holy Spirit at pentecost and the vibrant life of the early church in Acts 2. And today we come to this story of the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate in Acts 3. There are three groups of people in this story: the sufferer, the sent ones, and the spectators. Three different groups of people in this story and the gospel is for each one of them. The gospel is for the sufferer in their pain and weariness, but it's not just for the sufferer. The gospel is not just for the sent - the disciples of Jesus, the bible nerds, the fully bought-in the radical followers. The gospel meets the sufferer, the sent one, and the spectator, offers the answer to their deepest questions, and calls them into something greater.

Let's look at the book together.

### II. The Gospel for the Sufferer

Who is the sufferer? In the story in Acts 3 the sufferer is the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. We meet him in verse 2: <sup>2</sup> ...a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. This man had borne the hardship of a physical disability since he was born; and it says in Acts 4:22 that he was more than

forty years old. He'd been suffering physically for forty years. Not only was he physically disabled, but the text tells us he was also impoverished. Asking for alms is an old fashioned way of saying that he was asking for money or food. The circumstances of his life had forced him to beg for handouts from the temple goers every day. On top of all that, in being placed daily at the temple gates, we can also reason that he was an outsider because he was kept from entering the temple. Whether because of the prejudice of the people or the necessity of poverty, he was placed on the outside, at the gate. He was kept from entering the temple, which meant that as a Jew he was separated from the community and he was cut off from the presence of God (because for Jewish people God dwelt in the temple and the temple is where you go to worship in his presence). Kept from the community of faith, kept from the presence of God.

So here is someone who is suffering physically because of his disability and his poverty, suffering socially because he's unable to participate in communal worship, and he's suffering spiritually because he's kept from worshiping God in the temple. And of course when we experience hardship in any one area of life it often bleeds into other aspects of life. Liek, Have you ever experience physical suffering - an injury or a diagnosis - and then dealt with depression? Our suffering doesn't stay neatly packed into the different compartments of our life, it leaks. This man's whole life - his heart, his physicality, his social life, his spiritual life is tinged with pain.

Do you know this man? Is this man you? We all know people who experience deep suffering. And if you don't know this already I have to tell you, we all will experience deep suffering ourselves. Many of us already have. The Christian life does not promise an escape from anguish. The blessed life in Jesus is not a promise of a painless life.

For many people, suffering gives birth to difficult questions. And perhaps the deepest, most difficult question that a sufferer can ask is, **Where is God in my pain?** That's a question that I've heard asked out of desperation: *I'm trying to see how God is at work in my pain, but I can't.* It's a question I've heard asked out of anger: *Where are you God? Why are you allowing this to happen?* It's a question I've heard asked out of disbelief: *If there is a God, why does he allow so much suffering?*

Now some people try to answer that question outside of the gospel, without the lens of the Bible. Where is God in my pain? He is either not there, meaning he doesn't exist. Or if he does exist, he's not powerful, unable to deliver me from my pain. Or he's not good - he's indifferent to my sorrow, or he's far removed from my suffering. But this story in Acts 3 gives a different answer to the question, **Where is God in my pain?** The gospel gives a better answer: Jesus sees you in your pain, walks with you in your pain, offers freedom from your pain, and will even transform your pain. Let me show you what I mean:

### **Jesus Sees You In Your Pain**

Look at verse 3 & 4: <sup>3</sup> Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. <sup>4</sup> And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." Now Peter and John were still practicing the rhythms of the Jewish life, Acts 2 says the believers were attending the temple day by day (46). And you remember that the lame man was placed by the gate every day. So that means that Peter and John had probably walked by this man many times. But that day Peter and John directed their gaze on him. Why? Because God directed his gaze on him. The Holy Spirit of God saw this lame begger in his suffering and that day decreed for him to be healed.

This is totally compatible with the Jesus of the NT. The Jesus who looked on the crowds and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The Jesus who didn't let Zachaeus observe him from the outside, but looked at him and invited him into fellowship with him.

The Jesus who stopped to speak with the woman who had touched him in the crowd and been healed. The Jesus who saw the little children and said, let them come to me. The Jesus who looked at Peter and called him into discipleship.

The OT tells the story of Hagar who was a servant who was used sexually by her master, forced to carry a child that she didn't ask for, and abused by her mistress, so she fled into the desert. And the Lord comes to her in the wilderness and says, "Hagar..." He's the first one the story to use her name. And he gives her a promise about the child in her womb. And Hagar gives the Lord a name. She says, "You are the God who sees... Truly here I have seen the one who looks after me" (Gn 16:13)

The God who saw Hagar is the God who saw the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. And he is the God who sees the world and "so loved the world" that he did not remain indifferent to it, but sent his only Son (Jn 3:16). Jesus sees you in your pain and he is not indifferent.

### **Jesus Walks With You in Your Pain**

Jump with me out of the story of the healing, to Peter's sermon to the crowd. Peter says in verse 18 - <sup>18</sup> But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Now what's only hinted at here is something that is shouted in the rest of the Bible: the reality that Jesus Christ is God who put on flesh. God who walked in our shoes. God who dwelt among us.

Isaiah 53:4 - <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...

Hebrews 4:15 - <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus is a God who can see us in our pain and empathize. He doesn't just know our pain in theory, he understands it because he has walked through our pain with us. No other religion offers a God who suffers with his people, but the gospel of Jesus Christ puts forward a Savior who willingly suffered.

When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus and called him to rise from the dead, the story in John 11 says that it was after that miracle, because of that miracle that the the chief priests and pharisees made plans to put him to death. Jesus knew that was what would happen. And he chose to step into death for the sake of his people. You see, Jesus is not far removed from our pain, he has suffered with his people, and suffered for us. Jesus walks with you in your pain.

### **Jesus Offers Freedom From Your Pain**

This is a story about a man who really and truly received miraculous deliverance from his physical suffering. He was truly healed by the power of Jesus Christ. Looking at the world through gospel lenses means always being open to and even expectant for the supernatural to break into the natural, because we worship an all-powerful God. He is not impotent.

Now you ask, *Why not me?* And in part my answer is, *Yes why not you?* Why not pray for God to intervene in your life with supernatural power. He's done it before. I hear testimonies of him doing it in his church all over the world right now. Why wouldn't we pray and ask God for miracles? But the second part of my answer is that we need to understand the purpose of every miracle in the bible. No miracle in the bible is a raw display of power for the sake of displaying power, they all point us to deeper realities. They point to the power of the miracle-worker: Peter said, "In the name of Jesus

Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" The miracle is there to prove the presence and power of Jesus. Miracles also point to the future. The text says, "7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God." And if you were a Jewish person reading Luke's account you would immediately be hyperlinked back to a prophecy of God's redemption in the OT, in Isaiah 35, "6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." Every miracle points to the end of history! I love what Tim Keller says about this miracle,

In these miracles, we are being told that God did not invent a world with suffering, sickness, and death and that someday he will reverse it! The miracle is showing us that God is an enemy of suffering and if we are God's people we will also be enemies of suffering who will alleviate it any way we can. Knowing that someday it's going to be over.<sup>1</sup>

Most importantly, the display of Jesus power to push back darkness points to his authority to forgive sin. In the story the lame man is asking for money and Peter says, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" In other words, you're asking for something that you think will help you and I've got something that will meet your deeper need.

This is a parallel story to one of Jesus' healings in Matthew 9 where Jesus says to a paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." And heals him. And when Jesus says "your sins are forgiven," when Peter says, "you don't need silver and gold"... they're saying the real need you have - the only thing you must have is a restored relationship with God based on grace. As terrible as your suffering is your suffering in this life isn't your deepest problem. It is sin. "The physical is never your deepest need. It's the spiritual."<sup>2</sup> Your sin has separated you from the God you were made for and now no matter what you do, you will be like a fish on the shore gulping up gills full of air when you're made for the sea. Suffering on this earth will always raise its head like a game of whack-a-mole. The lame beggar was freed from one kind of suffering, but he didn't escape all of life's pain. How many of us, after getting what we have longed for have found discontent on the other side? Even if our temporal suffering is alleviated we will not escape life's pain. But Jesus, in suffering for us, offers us an unending well for our deepest thirst. In dying to pay for our sin, he purchased for his people a future free from Satan, sin, and death. And not only that, but he gives us a present reality where slavery to these things is broken by the living hope of his resurrection. **Jesus is not powerless, he offers ultimate freedom from your pain.**

**And finally, Jesus will even turn your pain into a trophy of his grace.**

**1 Cor 4:16-18** - <sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Imagine being the lame beggar for the first forty years of his life. As a child you can't run with your friends and you wonder, *Where is God?* As a young man, you're brought to the gate to beg for the first time and in your shame, you wonder *Where is God?* As you hold out your hand for alms, you see other people - bigger sinners than you - walking by on two strong legs and you wonder, *Where is God?* As you hear the voices in the temple and you sit on the outside day after day, you wonder *Where is God?* For forty years. But then what happens? "9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." You see, all of a sudden forty years of suffering is transformed into forty years of preparation. Forty years of suffering

<sup>1</sup> The First Miracle | [Timothy J. Keller](#) | Jan 6, 2013 | Acts 3:1-8, 13-23

<sup>2</sup> Keller

is transformed into the high bar that everyone at the temple can see as the power of Jesus vaults clear over the high bar. Forty years of suffering is transformed into the canvas on which the messiah displays the glory of his salvation. Forty years of suffering overcome by the power of Jesus is transformed into the means by which Peter is able to win a hearing from the people to preach the gospel and to bring salvation to thousands.

In the gospel the Lord doesn't just sweep our suffering under the rug and say sorry about that, you can forget about it now. The gospel transforms our suffering into something meaningful and glorious. This is what the Bible means when it says he makes beauty from ashes (Is 61:3).

When you wonder *Where is God?* in the midst of your pain, the gospel says, "God is on the ground *with* you, God is on the cross *experiencing* your pain, God is on his throne victorious over your pain, God is coming again to transform every ugly, broken, and painful thing into trophies of his total deliverance from suffering, sorrow, Satan, sin, and death. That is the gospel's answer for the sufferer. Jesus sees you in your pain, walks with you in your pain, offers freedom from your pain, and will even transform your pain.

That was the first point of the sermon. But I told you there are three different groups of people in this story and the gospel is for each one of them.

Not only does the gospel answer the deep question of the sufferer; the gospel answers the deep questions of the sent one and the spectator.

### **III. The Gospel for the Sent**

In the story the sent ones are Peter & John. They are two of the twelve apostles. Now "Apostle" is a title that the NT gives those twelve disciples. And they receive that title because the word, "apostle" means "sent ones." They have been sent by Jesus to be witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Peter and John are "sent ones" - they are apostles with a capital "A." And, like Peter and John, every follower of Jesus has been transformed into a small "a" apostle, a sent one - commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of all nations in Jerusalem, and Judea, and to the ends of the earth.

In Acts 3, Peter and John are sent ones who encounter a sufferer. And as people sent by Jesus you and I will encounter sufferers. What do you say? When you sit in the living room of parents who have lost their child, what can you say to them? What do you offer them when the phone rings late at night? What do you have to give to the person crying on your shoulder? In every tragedy, the world clamors for a response, our social media platforms pressure us to take a position, our tribal arguments push us to try and be experts on every crisis and for a Christian who is sent with the gospel the question we can insecurely ask in the face of all this pressure is, *What can I give to a world that cries out in need?*

Peter's example gives us a template for answering that question. Peter sees the suffering of the beggar and says, "<sup>6</sup>...I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

You know what happens to people when they really believe the gospel? Some of you have heard the gospel, maybe many times, but use this as a way to measure whether you've truly believed. When you are really awake to the reality of Jesus Christ, you begin to see yourself as you truly are: a sinful person, deserving the wrath of God for sin, with no strength to save yourself let alone the world around you. The beginning of the gospel is an honest assessment of the resources you have to save yourself. But the end of the gospel is the grace of God through Jesus Christ to come toward you in

your rebellion, to come toward you in your weakness and to save you and equip you as a tool in his hands to help others. Here's a quote I love: "The gospel is this: we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ that we ever dared hope."<sup>3</sup> And the people who have that gospel, though they are weak in themselves, have tremendous resources to offer a world that cries out in need. And this is what Peter offers to the lame beggar. He recognizes the resources he does not have and he offers the power he does have.

Here's something I should say clearly: this story does not mean that we shouldn't help people in their material needs or that we shouldn't care in whatever way we can for the physical suffering of the world. I read a quote earlier: "God is an enemy of suffering and if we are God's people we will also be enemies of suffering who will alleviate it any way we can." But what Peter does teach us in Acts 3 is that when we encounter the darkness of the world and we are tempted to think the darkness is too deep for us to make a difference, we have the greatest resource: Jesus Christ.

So if you are a sent one, you may not have silver or gold. You may not have the knowledge or expertise or humility that is necessary to speak to every issue being debated online. You may not have the opportunity to debate apologetics with your family member who's left the faith. You may not have the money, or strength, or infrastructure to battle the injustices of the world. Where God has blessed you with resources, by all means faithfully engage, but when you do not have silver or gold, you have the gospel. Do not be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. (rom 1:16)

**Side Note:** Do you see that this extraordinary kingdom act took place within the ordinary rhythms of consistent Christianity: gathering, prayer, and preaching? The power of the gospel most often works through consistent, faithful, ordinary pursuit of Jesus.

### III. The Gospel for the Spectator

Who are the spectators? In the story, here in Acts, the spectators are the crowd. They are not the sufferer. They are not the sent ones. They are not the skeptics (religious council) of chapter 4. They are the mushy middle, watching the power of God at work. They are the ones for whom the power of God was displayed, the ones who hear the word preached to them. The ones who receive this invitation from Peter in verse 19:

<sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, <sup>20</sup> that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

The spectator's question: *Why does this matter to me?* Maybe you're asking that question today.

Do you remember what this miracle point to? Do you remember that I quoted Isaiah 35, "<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." That isn't a prophecy about the Christ who came to live and die and rise again, this is a prophecy about the end of all things - when the work of Jesus is fully and finally realized. The miracle is a foretaste of the glory of the new heavens the the new earth. And do you know what that means? The gospel's answer to *Why does this matter to me?* is that all your longings - every soul-level hunger of your life - will be met in Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*

The Jewish spectators were waiting for a coming messiah to deliver them. And this story puts forward Jesus as the answer. We are looking for messiah's as well. And Jesus is the one our hearts have waited for. Peter says to the spectators, "You rejected him and you crucified him, but he has come to that your sins may be blotted out so that you - a citizen of this weary world - might know the time of refreshing, that you might see a world where all things have been restored. Where all the hungers of your life are satisfied with the things that were meant to fill the hunger.

Listen, apart from Jesus, all of our activity in the world is, as one philosopher said, a form of fidgeting on our way to death. And that's only of the gospel isn't true. And if the gospel is true, then apart from Jesus all our activity in the world is fidgeting on the way to eternal destruction. But if the gospel is true, then in Jesus all our longing, all our weariness, all our striving will be purified, and we will be refreshed.

#### **IV. Conclusion (Called Into Something More)**

These three groups of people - the sufferer, the sent ones, and the spectator - are not siloed categories. You are not just one of them, they're a spectrum of the human experience. Wherever you are in the human experience, the gospel is for you. The gospel is for your refreshing and for the refreshing of the world. Only in Jesus do we have the resources to answer our deepest questions and to receive the refreshing that our hearts long for. .

**His gospel calls us up from suffering** (get up and walk, get up and be not ruled by your pain)  
Jesus sees you in your pain, walks with you in your pain, offers freedom from your pain, and will even transform your pain.

**The Gospel calls us in from spectating.** Some of you are spectators on the outside looking in, you need to come in to real relationship with Jesus. The gospel's answer to you is to have all your deepest longings met in him

**The Gospel propels us out as Sent Ones.** Some of you are spectators on the bench, knowing Christ, but holding yourself back from diving into the fullness of life with him as one of his sent ones. And the invitation is come deeper into Christ, by seeing yourself as a Sent One propelled out toward a world in need with equipped the power of the gospel to make disciples here in Brighton and Howell and Livingston County and to the end of the earth.