

THE HEALING OF THE CRIPPLED BEGGAR

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ACTS 3

If you are reading and/or watching the news these days with any thought, any reflection, then you are concerned, maybe even anxious.

Maybe your son or daughter is not in the Middle East today (and for some of you, they are - and our prayers are with you as well as them) but even if your child or friend is not there, you realize how volatile that situation is.

Members of the House and Senate yesterday had one of the most serious and somber debates in the history of that deliberative body - a debate on war.

Isn't it amazing how quickly the mood of the Western world has changed?

Just over a year ago, we were rejoicing about the changes in Eastern Europe, China, The Soviet Union, and South Africa

Marxism was losing favor, democracy seemed to be the ideology of choice everywhere.

There was talk of a peace dividend that could aid the poor of our own country as well as many other countries.

But in a few seemingly short months, the whole mood has changed as have circumstances:

South Africans continue to kill each other by the thousands.

China has just tried the democracy seeking students of Tianemen Square.

The Soviet Union is coming unraveled and the potential for chaos and/or a resurgence of military rule is great.

Just this morning Soviet Tanks rolled into Vilnius, Lithuania and 15 are already dead and hundreds wounded.

Eastern Europe is sliding into sectional disputes and economic depression.

And the so-called "peace dividend" is being consumed in the deserts the Middle East while the whole world watches as we move apparently inexorably toward a war that is so unpredictable that it is nothing

short of frightening.

Yesterday afternoon's juxtaposition on television of an NFL playoff game and ABC News of impending war seemed hideously incongruent.

And for all their training, for all their bravado, and for all their fire-power - thinking soldiers are scared as they look death square in the face.

All of the sudden - cars, dates, schools, jobs, and recreation become very unimportant.

Does it take the threat of war or impending disaster to get people to think about what is truly important, foundational, fundamental?

Please find Acts 3 in your Bible and plan to study it with me.

I have been trained to look at a text of the Bible like this one and to ask the question: "Why is this paragraph or this account included in this book?"

There are so many things that Luke, the author, could have included in his book - why this one?

Writing under the directing inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, Luke tells us the account of a man being healed who had been crippled from birth. Why?

To show the godliness of the Apostles?

To tell heart-warming human-interest stories about early Christianity?

To give a history of the events of the early church?

Look please at ACTS 1:7-8:

Just before his return to heaven, Jesus told his disciples that their purpose in life was to be witnesses to who Jesus is and what He has done - and to be witnesses to the whole world.

In ACTS 2 we find that, sure enough, when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the disciples, unlike earlier, began to tell boldly who Jesus was.

So effective were they in the power of the Holy Spirit that thousands came to saving faith in Christ.

ACTS 2:43 gives us a summary statement of what was happening in those days:

"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

In Chapter 3 we have an illustration of one of the wonders and signs that was being done by them.

And what did a "sign" do?
It witnessed to the power of Jesus.

These signs and wonders (like this healing) demonstrated
that Jesus was who he said he was - the Saving Lord!

Luke's purpose for including it was to give witness to the person of Jesus.

This is no random account of a healing -
This is a testimony to Jesus.

Jesus is the message of this portion of the Bible.

Jesus - crucified, risen, coming again, and willing to
save those who repent and turn to Him.

It is this message of Jesus that is fundamental and foundational in a world in chaos - to
people in turmoil and fear.

Luke's readers, like Peter's audiences were people like us who lived in a world of upheaval
- with threats to peace on every side and no certainty about their economic future - or for
that matter about their very lives.

While I'm getting ahead of the story, I love Peter's
response to the beggar in Acts 3 :

"I don't have silver or gold, but what I
have I give to you" and what Peter offered
far surpassed money (or in our case, world peace)
Peter offered a sure relationship to the author
of life himself - Jesus Christ.

There is a Corn Flakes commercial that says,
"Taste them again for the first time"

To you I say, "Hear this message again maybe for the first time"

PRAYER: God, there are men and women and young people in this
place today who are not Christians - not saved from
the judgment to come.

Teach them please, that the biggest threat to life
is not Saddam Hussein.

Teach them that life does not consist first of

outward peace and prosperity but of inward peace with you.

Give me a tongue to speak and them ears to hear that Jesus, Jesus! is the only one who can save them.

Teach them what repentance is and what it means to turn to you so that they may know sins forgiven, a season of refreshing and have hope at the thought of your sure return.

Amen

IF you will look with me at ACTS 3 you will notice that there are two parts to the text:
The FIRST part is the account of the HEALING
The SECOND part is the RESPONSE.

To a person with any compassion at all - this account is beautiful!

Luke, the author of this book, tells us about a physically disabled man.

There was a man who had been crippled from birth who though over 40 years of age (according to 4:22) had been carried every day to an entrance to the Temple where he could beg for food.

We've all seen beggars and some of us have seen them in the poorer countries of the world.

In India, just over a year ago, I saw the crowds of beggars outside of the temples there.

As you would approach the gate of the building, a man or a woman or a child, misshapen from birth would reach a pitiful hand out to receive some money.

As Peter and John entered for the afternoon prayers, the man begged for money.

As I have observed in seeing beggars, while the man may have looked at them, he did it without really seeing them. He did it out of routine not out of expectation.

Peter said, "LOOK AT US!"

Don't just turn your eyes our way, really look.

To that, the man, undoubtedly startled, responded by really looking and now with expectation.

Hey! These guys might really give me something. Maybe it will be a gift larger than usual.

At that Peter said what must have been the most unusual, even most shocking words this man had ever heard:

And I love the way the King James Version of the Bible puts it:

"Silver and Gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk"

What would you do with that statement, if you were the crippled man?

Would you swear out of a frustration at getting no money?

Would you laugh at the utter ridiculousness of the sentence

We probably need to remember where this man was and what he would have known:

This cripple sat every day in the Temple gate.

This was the very same Temple area where people gathered in great crowds every day.

If anyone knew what was going on in that city, this man did.

If anyone had heard the stories about John the Baptist, about the healing of the man born blind, about the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which took place just over the hill behind him, he had.

He was there when Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple.

He was there when just 100 yards away he saw the crowd following as Jesus was led to the cross just 50 days earlier.

He may well have heard the first sermon of Peter given in Acts 2 or at least he had heard about it.

When this man fully looked at these passersby and realized who they were and then when he heard their command in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth - that would have spoken volumes to the man.

It was decision time for this man:

He certainly knew that he was disabled but he'd grown accustomed to it.

He wasn't even looking for a cure.
Could he even be cured?

Peter reached out his hand to the man as if to ask,
"Will you believe? I will lead you."

Would the man dare to make a fool of himself and take that hand?
Beggars that he'd known for years were watching.

The man responded in faith and stood up and instantly his feet and ankles became strong.
He stood, he stepped out, He walked, and then he jumped!

WHAT A PICTURE!

Remember that I said, that the man responded in faith and stood?
Why did I say it was faith?
Because that is what Luke tells us Peter said: 3:16 READ

This man had undoubtedly heard about Jesus and when Peter offered help in Jesus' name

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This man, by God's grace, believed that Jesus was who
He had claimed to be - and in his case he was offered
healing, which he believed and accepted by standing and
walking.

I think it is important for you to see the progression of the story:
First The man is presented as physically disabled
Jesus is presented as the answer to his real need.
A response is required of the man - "Walk"
The man exercises faith in Jesus - He believes and responds
and last the healing takes place.

Now again I ask, Did Luke include this account just to show us the compassion of the
apostles?

No. It was included as a "sign" - a powerful indication that Jesus was who he
claimed to be - God/ our Savior.

As important as physical healing is, there is something far more important.
As important as peace in the Middle East is,
there is something far more fundamental.

Find MARK 2 , please and notice how similar this account is to the one in ACTS 3:
Here was a man who was paralyzed.
Some friends bring him to Jesus.
Jesus says to the man, "Your sins are forgiven".
Some religious legal types were sitting there and they

said that only God can forgive sins.
So Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or to say 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?"

Look at verse 10:

"So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

The man got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of everyone.

What did Jesus prove? That he was who he claimed to be and that far more important than healing physical disability was his power to heal spiritual disability.

Back to Acts 3 we come to the second part of the text:

The RESPONSE by the crowd to the event that just took place.

Here's why Luke includes this account:

3:10 The people around were amazed at what had happened.

3:11 A crowd gathers around as Peter, John enter the temple area with the now jumping and praising man dancing around them.

Not one to miss an opportunity, Peter preaches.

Please note the progression of this portion of the text:

It is parallel to the progression of the account of the healing:

Peter starts by telling the crowd that they are SPIRITUALLY DISABLED (vs. 13-15) just as the man before them had been physically disabled.

He continues by telling them that FAITH IN JESUS will cure their disease (vs. 16-18) just as surely as by Faith in Jesus the man before them had been healed.

He then demands of them a response in vs. 19 "Repent" just as the crippled man had been commanded to "walk"

And after telling how the prophets had foretold of Jesus we see that faith was exercised and many were healed of their sins (4:4)

Up to that point in time the people who gathered around Peter and John and jumping man were convinced that their biggest problems were
the foreign army occupying their country,
the Jewish collaborators who were oppressing the people,
the uncertainty of their economic future,
and the everyday problems common to all people.

But having their attention, Peter tells them that these are not nearly their biggest problem.

If I were to stand before a group of our soldiers in the sands of the Saudi desert today, I would say, with sensitivity to their current fears, that their biggest problem is not Saddam Hussein.

I say to you who are here, your biggest problem is not poor health, or rising oil prices, or potential unemployment.

Your biggest problem is God!

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell... Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my father."

Peter points an indicting but caring finger at that crowd around him and says in effect (vs. 13-15)

You are in trouble with God.
You handed Jesus over to be killed
You disowned Him
You chose a murderer rather than the Son of God
You killed the author of life.

And while Peter's audience was charged with those sins literally, everyone of us is charged with those same sins spiritually:

Every sin, is at the essence of it, a killing of God.

Every time a person does what God would not have them do,
they are in effect putting God off of His throne,
and disowning the authority which belongs to Him.

Every violation of God's law is treason - a rebellion
against God.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, sin openly and literally did to him what all sin does to him spiritually.

While we may think that OUR sinful thoughts and actions are little things, they are nails into Deity.

Every sin is really an attempt to put God out of your world, and every sin says, "Let there be no God!"

Is that you? Is your life lived secretly in rebellion against God?
Have you disregarded Him - thereby disowning Him?

Charles Spurgeon asked that we imagine what our world would be like if God did as our sin suggests?

What if God did leave us totally on our own?

What if all of us, the whole world of people, were just allowed to wallow in our sins against Him and each other?

What instant chaos, what degradation, what hopelessness.

Look at verse 15:

Yes, you killed the Author of Life BUT
God raised Him from the dead.

Just as certainly as Jesus was presented to the man born crippled as the source of his healing, so here Peter presents Jesus to this crowd as the source of their healing.

Look at verses 17-18.

Maybe you didn't know that Jesus was truly the Son of God.
Maybe it never got through to your mind before that this
was the importance of who Jesus was.

Maybe you never understood before how sinful and rebellious
your sins against God really are.

But now you see, as verse 18 tells us, that just as God
planned and foretold through the prophets - Jesus came
to suffer - to die on the cross in your place.

It was your sins that He died for.

On that Cross, Jesus took the penalty for your sins

Healing for your spiritual disease is found in Him.

Now note verse 19.

Just as Peter demanded a response from the man born crippled, so here Peter demands a response from these born spiritually disabled:

He says they must "REPENT and TURN TO GOD"

Look how gracious our God is:

His command is not simply "Repent" - as some malevolent dictator might demand hollow allegiance.

With His demand to repent come promises of grace to meet our greatest needs

First, Peter says, "Repent that your sins may be wiped out" Only the mentally numbed escape the guilt of their sin.

Every human being longs to see something of their past altered.

And the more we see ourselves as God sees us, the more guilty we feel, and the more we try to escape the condemnation that burdens our thoughts.

Peter says, "Repent and turn to God so that:
YOUR SINS MAY BE WIPED OUT"

Financial accounts would be kept on a wax ledger.

Every debt you had would be placed on the ledger by making impressions (marks) in the wax.

When a debt was removed the wax would be smoothed over with a utensil - wiping out the debt.

When a person is willing to turn from their sins to Christ - decide to change their minds about hanging on to their old way of life and instead turn to following Christ as Lord of their life - confessing their sin, confessing their need of forgiveness, and trusting Jesus to forgive them based on His death on their behalf -

the sins are wiped out - gone - forgiven.

Peter also says that when you "Repent and turn to God:
"Seasons of refreshing will come from the Lord."

Just as the "wiping out of your sins" deals with the past, so "seasons of refreshing" deals with the present.

There is no sweeter relief in the world

than the relief of knowing that you are forgiven.

And to be forgiven by God, the one we have most offended, is the sweetest of all.

And though there are valleys, sometimes deep valleys of difficult times, ask any Christian if they would go back to the old ways and the old bondage's and the old fears -

and they would tell you, NO.

To have experienced the seasons of refreshing that I have had in Jesus is to never leave them again.

War may come, economic depression may happen, health may fail, and death will inevitably come eventually - but I have found a ship to navigate the chaos of our days -

And the captain is Jesus.

Horatio Spafford wrote it this way:

"When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to
say, it is well, it is will with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
and has shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well, It is well with my soul.

When we are willing to repent of our sins, to turn from them to following Christ, God gives us seasons of refreshing - the very presence of His own Spirit.

And note last in verse 20, that when we "repent and turn to God", we are given the assurance of the coming again of Jesus.

And to those who have turned to follow Him, they anticipate his coming not with fear but with joy.

Jesus is coming, as it says in verse 21, to restore everything - to put everything right.

The Dictators of the People's Republic of China may rant
and Saddam Hussein may rave,
and the leaders of the world may rattle their swords,

BUT

Jesus is sovereign and he puts kingdoms up and he puts them down as he wills.

And there is a day coming when he shall finally put everything in order - justice will prevail.

You see, there is something more important than peace in the Middle East - it is peace between you and God.

The call of God to some of you today is to "Repent and turn to HIM".

Oh you may have a form of godliness,
you may have conformed to middle-class church standards of
conduct,
you may have a firm belief in the historicity of Jesus,

But have you ever acknowledged that you are a spiritual
cripple that has rebelled against God's right to rule
in your life -

you have lived your relationship to God on your
terms, not His?

And will you today confess your sin against God,
turn from that sin, and turn to God, openly, unreservedly,
as Lord, master of your life.

Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto you, in the name of Jesus
Christ of Nazareth, "repent and turn to God"
that your sins may be forgiven
that you may know seasons of refreshing
and that you may anticipate with joy the coming again of the
sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords -
Jesus, God the Son.

How about you, is today the day of salvation?

PRAYER