

The Church Unleashed In Power

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 October 2020

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[0 : 0 0] Today's theme is the church unleashed in power. So as we look at this story from Acts chapter 3, let me ask you a question. At what point in the story do we see God's power show up?

Now I think the obvious answer to that question is that we see God's power most explicitly at the point where this man, and we're not told his name, this man who's never been able to walk, is told by Peter to get up in the name of Jesus, and he does. It's a miraculous healing, it's humanly impossible. It's harder to find a clearer manifestation of God's power than that.

But I want to suggest that there are three words in this story that can be easily overlooked. And it's when Peter says to the man, look at us. It's easy to miss because there's more in that simple exchange than first meets the eye. First, it tells us something important about the situation in which we see God's power manifest. From the point of view of the man who gets healed, think what's going on here. Now we're not told his name, but we are told that he's never been able to walk since the day he was born. We're also told that he was carried here every single day of his life so that he could beg. That's his reality. He's never known anything different. Peter says to him, look at us, because although he's asking for money, he's clearly not looking at Peter as he makes that request. He's become so accustomed to his situation, so entrenched in it, that it's just a way of life that he's resigned himself to. So now he's just on automatic pilot. He just sits there every day, waiting for people to go in and out of the temple, trotting out the same words without making any eye contact. The humiliation has long since been eroded. It's just what happens. So he doesn't even look at

Peter as he talks to him. I want to suggest there's something representative here about the world in which we're called to be channels of God's power. Like that man sitting there begging, we live in a world that has simply gotten used to things as they are. It's understandable that like that man, the world goes on autopilot. So many people have simply become resigned to the version of reality that is presented to them daily. There's no expectation of a radical healing. The bar of expectation was lowered a long time ago. But God, of course, sees things rather differently. And he calls us to do likewise.

And we see this modelled in Peter here. He takes one look at this guy sat there in his resignation, and he refuses to take the easier options of either walking straight past or just dropping some cash in his box. He believes in more than that. He says, look at us. The bar of expectation is raised. Peter refuses to see this man as a category, as just another person on the streets begging. In making eye contact, he's seeing him as a fellow human being. Now, how often do we see people as categories? Because we just don't know them. We haven't looked at them properly and made the connection with them as Peter does here. You know, I've heard it said by psychologists that when you're driving a car, one reason why it's so easy to be provoked into anger by another driver is that you see the vehicle, not the person in that other vehicle. If you're on the road and someone narrowly misses bumping into you or overtakes you, it's much more likely to invoke an emotional response than would be the case if you were walking on the pavement and another pedestrian narrowly misses walking into you or overtakes you on foot. See, seeing the other person, and especially when you see them face to face, makes all the difference. That's why talking with someone in person is almost always more helpful and productive than engaging in written communication.

[4 : 59] If you've ever got difficult conversations that you need to have, you know, it's much better to have those difficult conversations face to face than by exchanging, say, emails or texts.

The bottom line is we're much more connected as human beings when we look at each other, and that's what Peter does right here. He knows that God is powerful, and he knows that if God's power is going to be shared with and experienced by others, then it requires an act of human courage and vulnerability on his part. He needs to get involved. He needs to stop what he's doing and get alongside this man and properly connect with him. Now, there's a challenge to each and every one of us.

As a church, we're called to move in God's power, not in our own power, and that starts with us being willing and ready to place ourselves in risky and vulnerable situations, daring to come alongside and stay alongside others. We need to be willing and ready to reach out in our own humanity to connect with others in theirs. Peter shows us what happens when we dare to do that in the name of Jesus.

And remember, God's power is real, very real, and it's too easy to forget that. Every year since 1890 in Pasadena, California, there's a big New Year's Day carnival called the Rose Parade.

Horses, marching bands and carnival floats make their way around the streets of Pasadena, and hundreds of thousands of people come out to watch. Many of those floats represent various commercial companies. On one occasion a few years ago, the whole parade was ground to a sudden halt because one of the floats spluttered and stopped. It had run out of petrol. Everything stood still while someone had to go off and get a can of petrol. It was pretty embarrassing for the driver.

[7 : 14] But what made it even more embarrassing was the fact that the float represented the standard oil company. With all its vast oil resources, its truck was out of fuel.

J.B. Phillips paraphrases Ephesians 1 verses 19 to 20 in the following way. It says, how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God?

Like Peter, we need to be ready and willing to be available to connect with others by daring to look them in the eye, to come alongside them and stay alongside them. And we also need to be ready and willing to make firm our connection with God so that his life-renewing power may flow through us.

When we do that as a church, then we truly are unleashed.