

A fresh start for the Hopeless

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Date: 07 March 2021

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 3, starting at verse 1. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that's called the Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those entering the temple.

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, look at us.

And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 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. And he took him by the right hand, raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

[1 : 10] And leaping up, he stood and began to walk and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God and recognised 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. While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.

And when Peter saw it, he addressed the people. Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this? Or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate when he decided to release him.

[2 : 29] But you denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. And you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know.

And the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as also did your rulers.

For what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 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.

Moses said, The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you, and it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.

[4 : 02] And all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and those who came after him also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

Okay, well, the allure of gold. It's been a constant in human history, I think. It's a universal symbol of power, wealth, security, grandeur and extravagance.

Kings have decorated their palaces with gold. Ancient societies, their high status people were buried with huge quantities of gold for the next life even.

Major temples of major religions absolutely glitter with gold. Every currency in the world, as far as I know, is secured by gold.

[5 : 29] We reward our top athletes with gold medallions. The movie industry has thrived on the notion of gold. A gold fever.

The quest for gold. The fact that people will kill for gold and so on and so forth. The allure of gold. This morning as we continue our series on Acts called The Unstoppable Jesus, we're actually confronted with something that's presented to us as better than gold.

And that is the power of Jesus to give us a fresh start. To give the lifeless and the hopeless a fresh start through forgiveness, renewal and reconnection to God and his rich blessing.

Remember Luke's purpose in writing the Acts was to record what Jesus continued to do and to teach after he was resurrected and taken back to heaven.

Which is gathering all those he died for into his kingdom community, the church. And already in the story we've come across some really radical things.

[6 : 50] We've seen the radical fulfillment of God's promise to deliver the Holy Spirit. And we've seen a radical change in a large number of people. And we've seen a radical new community, the church, emerging as a result of that change.

And this morning we're going to be confronted with something equally radical. That is a radical new salvation pathway to Jesus.

So jump into chapter 3 with me. The incident begins with a very public healing of a very public figure. A man who had lived with a profound physical disability since birth.

And in chapter 4 verse 22 it's later identified that this man was in his 40s. A lifetime of severe physical disability. Unable to walk or move by himself.

Reduced to begging in order simply to survive. His life would have been life full of shame.

[7 : 59] Hardship. And utter dependence on the generosity of others. Which doesn't sound much to us but we all love our autonomy, don't we? The generosity of others both to carry him to his spot, we're told, every afternoon.

And also the generosity of, well, strangers after 40 years perhaps. Generosity of others to give him money to survive. And goodness only knows what other help he needed on a daily basis given his extended paralysis.

And here he is, as the story tells us, positioned at the main entrance into the temple, which is called the Beautiful Gate.

Now that Beautiful Gate, if the historians are right, is a tiring, a tiring 20 meter high doorway. Double doors, in fact. Made of Corinthian bronze.

Tons and tons of Corinthian bronze. Josephus said it was called the Beautiful Gate because that gateway of all the gateways into the temple, that was far more beautiful than the other gateways.

[9 : 12] Listen for it. Made of, overlaid with silver and gold. This was a stunning place. A stunningly beautiful place where this man was sitting.

But that immediately throws us into a contrast because this man's life was devoid of beauty. He would have been a social and religious outcast.

His fellow Jews would have looked at him. They may well have given him money, but they still would have looked at him from a distance and seen him as one cursed by God because of his physical disability.

And in fact, it's a little bit ambiguous in intertestamental history, but the most likely scenario is that this man, because of his physical disability, was actually barred from going into the temple proper. He had a form of life, but really was lifeless. He was a little bit more. And hopeless. Beyond the help of medical facilities.

[10 : 30] Beyond the help of his family, his friends. Beyond the help even of Judaism. The religion of his birth. And into that moment, Peter, with very little fuss, declares the man healed in the name of Jesus.

and as proof of those words the guy's on his feet which means not just instant muscle strength but instant neuroreceptor connections right down to tell his brain to leap and jump and go crazy and he follows them into the temple or goes with them into the temple bouncing with excitement and why wouldn't he be and giving credit to God and the crowd were stunned why wouldn't they be and then Peter seizes the moment to put the whole thing into the context of Jesus and salvation so I want to just stop there in a sense and prop there for a moment because first and foremost I want to suggest

to us as we unpack this text that this incident is a further confirmation of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour rather than being about miracles let me try and explain that there's a strong parallel in the way Luke structures chapter 2 and chapter 3 now they're in the original text there weren't chapter divisions but there were still divisions there's a strong parallel between that which we call Acts 2 and Acts 3 each begins with a supernatural event but in each situation the focus very quickly moves away from that supernatural event to understanding the event in terms of the unstoppable Jesus both the supernatural arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 and this miracle in Acts chapter 3 I believe are symbolic confirmation that the long promise the long awaited Messiah the age of salvation that he would bring had arrived and it had arrived in Jesus and in each incident Peter makes clear as he steps up and addresses the crowd Peter makes clear in the way he interprets it for the crowd what they've just seen not only is Jesus unstoppable is what Peter's effectively saying but Jesus is also God's pathway to salvation and renewal that which was promised long ago through the prophets to come through Messiah well this is it Jesus is him the time has arrived salvation is among us in the person of Jesus and further confirmation of that I think is hidden in verse 8 of chapter 3 that part that sounds familiar to us walking and leaping and praising God if that sounds a bit familiar it's because it's the language of Isaiah it's also the language of Handel's Messiah but not many of you necessarily would know that it's familiar to us and so I think what Luke has done here is deliberately use the language of Isaiah because the context in which Isaiah wrote was exactly this that you will recognize the age of salvation when it dawns among you you will recognize Messiah because the lamb will leap for joy there will be supernatural events that will just be radical and beyond belief

Luke's telling us that this also is a confirmation of Jesus as Messiah Jesus as God's Savior and God's King now I just got to stop there and I want everybody to listen really really carefully because I don't want to have 150 conversations after this morning I am not saying I'm not suggesting for a moment that the Lord does not ever heal people physically these days I am saying that this healing is not a blueprint for us to repeat as we seek to do evangelism as we seek to convince people to believe in Jesus the point here I think is that Jesus radically changes life lives from the inside out as the prophets predicted

Messiah would do change hearts of stone to living creatures take dead people spiritually dead people and make them alive that's the point that's on show here Jesus is the one who's doing that dramatically and noticeably now friends I think you'd have to say with me that there is there is no more compelling evidence compelling testimony to the power and desire of Jesus to renew us than a radically changed life and this is the life we see before us the emphasis here immediately goes to this guy once he's healed going to praise God spiritual and physical healing parallel each other go back to Mark chapter 2 the healing of the paralytic in Christ's early ministry spiritual and physical healing parallel each other and Christ has the power to do both

[16:42] Christ's ability to heal physical afflictions testifies to the power that is less visible but perhaps more eternally significant the power to heal our souls the power to renew us from the inside out moving on then the pathway to salvation that has been set out here in Jesus exposes real spiritual need not perceived desires I'm trying to set up a little bit of contrast there in my headings now what's the immediate perceived need of this disabled man in the story apparently it's money he wants money because money is the only thing that he can see which will alleviate his terrible situation and deliver him the best version of life that he could expect to have which is pretty miserable but nevertheless it will be the best version he could expect as I said before though alive he was lifeless hopeless it was totally lacking autonomy given his dependence on others his reality his reality was just daily desperation but there's nothing wrong with his head

I don't think he was very pragmatic I suspect this guy wily after 40 years because he had worked out that the best place to put his distorted dare I say grotesque body on show and that's not a reference to all physical disabilities it's trying to pick up the story here the best place to put that on show he worked out was at this temple gate why?

I suspect he was convinced he would exploit any sense of guilt or embarrassment people who passed him daily might have felt and there would have been a constant stream this was the most popular entrance into the temple there would have been hundreds if not thousands gone past him daily and there he was in all his agony and you can imagine it just a pang of guilt and the note you get out of your wallet is a bigger one perhaps he's also exploiting the religious sensibilities of this ongoing stream of able-bodied upright Jews going into the temple to pray now almsgiving or giving

to the poor or the needy was a very big part of Jewish religious life and these guys were going to pray so this crippled man may well have been thinking well okay these guys if they give me a donation going into the temple well they're going to actually be able to begin to pray with a little bit more of a sense of confidence before the Lord

I've fulfilled your laws Lord I'm a good person Lord give me your blessing Lord this man knew he needed help with life he didn't know he needed Jesus initially he didn't realize his relationship with God was as totally disabled spiritually as what he was physically he seemed oblivious to the fact that the beautiful gate that he was parked beside actually blocked his access to God he just didn't seem to be thinking in that space for him it was just a great place to get money likewise the able-bodied people there's a lot to be learned from them in this story

I think the able-bodied people streaming into the temple every day were likewise oblivious to their deep spiritual needs their perceived need as they were trotting into the temple was to get God's blessing as a result of prayer as they passed the beggar no doubt they thanked God that they were not sinful like this wretched person was and that they hadn't experienced God's curse God's judgment like this wretched man had that they could freely enter the temple now their expressed need was simply to get God's blessing by doing what good Jews do going to the temple sacrificing praying giving to the poor they also failed to understand the seriousness of their sin yes it's true that these male

[22 : 09] Jew able-bodied Jews could get one courtyard further into the temple so if you think about it as moving towards God they could get one courtyard closer to God than this disabled guy could but hey they were still when they got to the other side of that courtyard they were blocked out because they couldn't go into God's presence because of their sin so yeah well what difference does one courtyard make at the end of the day you drown ten meters off the shore you drown a mile off the shore or two kilometers whatever and likewise Jewish women they wouldn't even have been able to go as far into the temple sorry they wouldn't have been able to go any further into the temple than this disabled man was and likewise the Gentiles because this beautiful gate separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of Israel the court of the Jews so it's all there all these people all their perceived desires oblivious to their deep needs the deep need of renewed access to God they were all in the end in the same basket they were all spiritually disabled not much difference really between them and this desperate character they saw before them every single day it's just that the beggar was perhaps more more aware of his condition up to a point anyway moving on Peter addresses the spiritual needs of both the disabled man and the apparently healthy crowd offering them a fresh start through God's new temple not more religious effort and again hopefully this will come clear as I move through the point so the testimony of this man is really compelling no question about that but testimony of itself is never going to be enough we need to speak about Jesus and that's exactly what Peter does testimony tells us what

Jesus has done in a person's life in our own experience but we need to hear objectively about who Jesus is and what he's done for all mankind so Peter addresses the spiritual needs of both the disabled man and the apparently healthy crowd and Peter speaks interestingly not at all about the healing or the man who's just been healed nor about himself or his part in the miracle he speaks only about Jesus he speaks about the authority of Jesus he speaks about the death and resurrection of Jesus he speaks about the implication of these things for salvation and for receiving God's blessing my friends Peter goes to the source of the healing with very confronting words might add to these religious

Jews and what he says essentially is this picking up in verses 13 to 15 now listen here you guys you need to understand that in every way imaginable you guys totally dishonored Jesus you failed to listen to him verses 22 through 25 you failed to listen to him when he came to you obviously at the very least he came to you as a prophet but there was actually more than that you dishonored him in spite of all the evidence verses 13 to 15 all the evidence pointing to the fact that he was God he was doing things that only God would do could do and he's properly called and in those verses Luke lays it on Peter lays it on to the crowd he's properly called the holy and righteous one that was the name of God he's properly called the author of life and you guys killed him not just accidentally killed him but you pursued him and deliberately bypassed the law in order to have him murdered strong words indeed and another contrast emerges in stark contrast to the way you guys have dishonored

Jesus we see how God the Father honored him verse 13 and 15 God glorified Jesus through his life death and resurrection and indeed his return to the throne in heaven so Peter is saying this you guys dishonored Jesus in every way imaginable God honored Jesus in every way imaginable and here's the specific Peter lays on the crowd in raising Jesus from the dead God confirmed Jesus as uniquely and exclusively the Lord and Savior of all people the healing of this man is in a sense if I can say that simply proof that

[28 : 04] Jesus is Lord and Savior verse 16 and it's called the man perfect health in other words it's more than just physical health it's the whole being health so again let's let's revise what happened to this man he heard the promise in his desperation he heard the promise that Jesus offered him something far better than money it's unlikely that Peter and John had actually no money at all in their pockets in fact chapter 2 says they had access to a lot of money that's not what Peter is talking about here he says I'm not dealing in the currency of this world my friend I want to talk to you about the currency of heaven offering him something far better than money restoration to perfect health being renewed from the inside out physically and spiritually and in response this man believed that

Jesus could do it and that Jesus was willing to do it and would do it for him personally in all his misery and that of itself is the first evidence of Jesus working powerfully in the man's heart so he actually grasps the power that was in a sense offered to him in these words and this act of faith as it's called in verse 16 itself a gift from God resulted in the man being completely healed and a new desire the inside healing a new desire to be near God to praise him that's a marvelous story isn't it that's a marvelous story for this man but Peter doesn't stop there because he said you know what this man before you has experienced is available to every one of you here now if you'll turn to Jesus you too he says to the crowd can experience this total perfect health this renewal from the inside out and verses 19 through to 21 if they repent recognizing all that Jesus is and all that Jesus did for them as God's kingdom and savior then here's the rub says Peter I can tell you now that God will not treat you as you treated Jesus that's a powerful statement of repentance isn't it and the consequence and the results of repentance God will not treat you in the crowd in the way that you have dishonored Jesus God will not dishonor you in fact God will bring you to a position of honor they would enjoy a fresh start that's in those verses a fresh start which is receiving forgiveness having your sin and the guilt of your sin wiped away the word in here is refreshing and that is an Old Testament idea of renewal recharging the batteries or putting the bank account back into the black when it's been trillions of dollars in the red all those sort of images built into the refreshing the renewal idea and the guarantee that Jesus would come back and take them to heaven to be with them forever now my friends this is where we just got to step back in and see the big temple in the background because in effect I think what Peter's saying to the crowd is don't look up there to the bricks and mortar because in fact I'm telling you here now that Jesus is God's temple Jesus is the new temple which God promised through the prophets and which Jesus himself claimed to be check out chapter John chapter 2 verses 12 through 25 Jesus said to the religious leaders and they had no idea what he was talking about destroy this temple and in three days

I will raise it up again for it will be raised up again he was speaking of himself and his mission now according to Jewish understanding and according to the Old Testament scripture according to the prophets Jerusalem was the physical center of God's kingdom the kingdom of Israel national Israel and the temple was the spiritual heart of the kingdom now what was the significance of the temple the temple was where God resided among his people it was the physical people where people could see God living as it were and it was the temple where they went to to connect with God they had to offer sacrifices they needed a priest in the temple to be able to access God it was the temple they went to to receive forgiveness it was the temple then they offered other sacrifices of fellowship offerings to ensure the ongoing the continuation of relationship with God given that they were sinful people and he was a holy God it was a place where people

[33 : 48] God's people would enjoy refreshment as they enjoyed his wonderful blessing as they were shaped as a community because that was one of the things that they had to be they had to reflect God's character to the ends of the earth that was what it was about of course national Israel failed miserably to do any of that and Peter's now saying to these people all of whom are spiritually disabled all of whom are in a sense cut off from God even though they're standing in this magnificent building called the temple Peter's essentially saying don't look to the bricks and mortar don't look to history don't look to tradition look to Jesus he is your temple he is the place you go to

for forgiveness he is the one who will assure you and confirm to you ongoing relationship and acceptance with God he is where you see

God in all his glory and he will shape you into that community that will display God's character to the ends of the earth the first glimpse of which we saw at the end of chapter 2 Jesus says Peter is God's pathway to salvation he is the pathway away from lifelessness and hopelessness away from the distorted and disabled by sin away from that which the Bible another point calls an empty way of life handed down to us by our forefathers Jesus is the pathway to break the cycle of despair to break the cycle of exclusion from God with no hope of anything better in the future he is the one who will shape the new community the church so Christ's character displayed to the ends of the earth in fact the last few verses chapter 22 to 26 as I finish up now

I just draw your attention to that it's almost as if Peter said now look this what I'm talking to you about now is the very thing that God has desired to give you all along this is what he spoke to Abraham and Moses and David and all the prophets about and it's here just listen for goodness sake he's saying to the crowd listen to what God has said to you in Jesus and you will receive the very blessing that God has always wanted to give you turn to Jesus for perfect health and experience sorry turn to Jesus for perfect health and experience every blessing of God I'll finish on this the choice for the crowd and therefore the choice for you and me could not be more simple with the consequences of that choice not being able to be more profound listen says Peter turn to Jesus for perfect health and to experience every blessing of God or shut your eyes shut your ears continue to reject Jesus and as it says they experience the full judgment of God see how the choice is so simple the consequences are so profound so let me end where I started gold is always alluring it's the currency of this world but the currency of heaven is Jesus and so the question is a very simple one to you is that worth more than gold to you is he worth more than gold to you is belonging to Jesus a treasure you want for yourself for your children for your friends

I despair sometimes when I hear parents it may not be a true reflection of what they're saying but it's what they express needs I just want to give my children a good financial start in life let me pray Lord what a wonderful wonderful picture you've given us a very personal and immediate picture of this man's plight and then the fact that he's renewed in you Lord we recognize and acknowledge your both your power and your willingness to heal people physically and we know Lord that you do but help us Lord not to trip over this miracle and become demanding as though somehow that is the key point help us to look to the

[39 : 17] Lord Jesus and see that in him we have perfect health and help us to see the treasure that is far more value than money and help us to orientate our lives then Lord around our treasure in Jesus name Amen Thank you