

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:11:2006

Reading: Acts: 3: 1-26

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

7. THE CRIPPLE WHO DANCED IN CHURCH

Beat the odds ! Never say die ! Soar like an eagle ! These are mottoes of people who rise above life's difficulties to fulfil their dreams. Some do this through sheer hard work and determination. For example, Booker T. Washington, who was born a slave, desired an education in spite of his family's desperate poverty. After much effort and study, he graduated from College, became the president of Tuskegee Institute, and is now considered to be “ *the most influential spokesman for black Americans,*” of his day. Others overcome their disadvantages through creativity.

One man employed his imagination in solving a Goliath-sized problem when developers built a gleaming supermarket and a gigantic discount house on either side of his tiny general store. Undaunted, he scraped together his savings and purchased an eye-catching neon sign. Placed right over his storefront between the mammoth competitors, it read, “ *Main Entrance here.*” Sometimes, however, no matter how much hard work, no matter how much creativity, the odds are unbeatable. Such is the case in

(Acts Ch 3) Here is a man lame from birth, an outcast who survives by begging. Only an intervention from God would heal him of his disadvantage.

Now the contrast between Acts Ch 2 and Ch 3 is interesting. In the former we see Peter the preacher, here Peter the personal worker. In Acts Ch 2 we see the multitudes, here just one poor man. In the former we see the apostles ministry resulting in blessing, here their ministry results in arrest and persecution. (Acts 3:1) is a marvellous testimony to the power of prayer and to the indwelling Spirit in the lives of believers. “ *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*” That's interesting, isn't it ? They were Christians who belonged to the church, and yet they were still going to the Jewish Temple, observing the Jewish hours of prayer. Is it wrong to have special **places for prayer** ? No. Our Lord Jesus enjoyed going to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. (Jn 18:2)

Is it wrong to have special **times for prayer** ? Of course not. In fact, if we don't have special times for prayer, it is likely that we are not going to be praying at any other time. The psalmist said, “ *Evening and morning and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.*” (Ps 55:17 Dan 6:10) Three times a day the Jews gathered in the Temple to pray, in the morning, 12 noon, and at 3pm in the afternoon. So at the hour of prayer, Peter and John, two opposite kinds of people were going up to the Temple. They had fished together (Lk 5:10) They had prepared the Passover together (Lk 22:8) They had visited the

tomb together (Jn 20:3) Later, they went to Samaria together to minister to the people (8:14)

But here they are praying together. Isn't it amazing that men who fish together, and study together, and drink coffee together cannot pray together ? Many memories must have flooded their hearts as they went to pray together in the afternoon. Several days before that the Lord Jesus had hung upon the Cross. At that very hour, the Lord Jesus had cried out, “ *My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me.* ” (Mk 15:34) All of this was over now. He had been buried, laid in the grave, and then raised from the dead victoriously. He had now gone back to the Father, and they had been given the assignment of witnessing to others in His name. Sometimes the most wonderful opportunities to witness come when we don't expect them, and on the way to the Temple that day, they had the unexpected opportunity to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus.

Now as we study this section, we should note that the Jewish emphasis is very pronounced. Peter addressed Jewish men (3:12) and called them “ *children of the prophets and of the covenant.* ” (3:25) He referred to the Jewish fathers (3:13) as well as to the prophets (3:18 21-25) The phrase “ *times of restitution,* ” (3:21) is definitely Jewish and refers to the future earthly reign of Christ, the millennial kingdom promised in the prophets (Joel 2:25) The message is still going out, “ *to the Jew first,* ” (3:26) and is presented in Jewish terms. So this is probably not the kind of message we would give at an evangelistic meeting today, because it was designed specifically for

Peter's Jewish audience. As at Pentecost, Peter was addressing people who knew the Scriptures and were acquainted with the recent events in Jerusalem (Lk 24:18) Now there are three stages in this story that I want to touch upon this !

(1) THE MAN

Here is a man who had a problem from birth.

(a) *HIS PROBLEM WAS ALARMING:*

Today we call it a congenital birth defect. In (4:22) we learn that this man was over 40 years old. For over four decades he had been a cripple. Now put yourself in his filthy beggar's rags can you feel his despair ? He can go nowhere without help, he relies completely on other's handouts, his only purpose in living is survival. Being an invalid since birth, he has never known a healthy day, has never stretched out his legs and walked to the market or to a friend's house. Instead, his legs are useless appendages two perpetual reminders of the lifelessness he feels deep within his soul. Those were the circumstances of this man. He was a crippled man.

His Problem was Alarming !

Not only alarming because of his physical condition but also because his physical condition is a picture of the spiritual condition of all ever born into this world. The Bible says we are all born as spiritual cripples. “ *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* ”

(Rom 3:23 5:12) All have a sin nature. We were born that way. We were crippled by the fall. My we are living in a world of moral, emotional, and spiritual cripples. Sin cripples all it touches. Let sin make its inroads into a church, and it will cripple the ministry of that church. Let sin get its ugly hands on the life of an individual, and it will wreck, ruin, disjoint, disfigure, mar and twist it. (a) because I see in him a picture of us all. But notice:

(b) HIS PERSISTENCE WAS ALARMING:

For he was laid at that gate every day. Did you notice the contrast painted for us in (3:2) ? The **Beautiful Gate**, inside the temple mount area on the eastern side, separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Women. Like the other gates, it was large and ornate. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, it was made of Corinthian brass, and was so large that it took twenty men to close it. When the sun shone on that beautiful Corinthian Gate it was absolutely dazzling, and it cost an absolute fortune. Can you imagine a greater contrast ? Here was a gate that represented wealth, and a man who represented woe. Here was a gate that represented loveliness, and a man who represented lameness. A beautiful golden gate, and there sat a cripple begging for a few alms from the mercies of those who came by. What a contrast.

Now I'm not opposed to erecting beautiful buildings, but there is something wrong when a church becomes more interested in the beauty of its buildings, than the reason those buildings are constructed. There is

something seriously wrong, when we become more interested in ***the beauty of the sanctuary, than the bondage of the sinner.*** My every day they laid him, **persistently** at the gate. Do you know something ? The lost in our midst, the lost all around us, are our persistent responsibility. We cannot sidestep our personal responsibility. My you are not in this world to see how much money you can make, how many house's you can buy, how much property you can own.

I believe that one of the reasons why God did not transport us to heaven immediately we were saved, was because He has a job for you to do until you go to heaven, and a major part of that job revolves around crippled people out there who don't know Jesus Christ as their Saviour. It is absolutely criminal for us to say, "*I'm saved,*" have the cure for the sin-sickness of this world, go in and out of the doors of a church, and never notice, poor crippled sinners who need Christ as their Saviour. My did you notice that this is the way to reach the masses ? By helping the individual sinner ! Peter and John won the crippled beggar and his transformed life led to the conversion of 2,000 men. (4:4) You see if we have no time for personal work with individual sinners we'll not be given many opportunities to reach the masses for Christ. Like the Lord Jesus, like the apostles do you have time for individuals ? Here was **A MAN** who had **A Problem** and a **Persistence** that was **Alarming**. (1)

(2) THE MIRACLE

Now can you picture this scene ? Here is this poor

man just outside the gate, he cannot go through it for Levitical law says, “*That man is deformed.*” He’s just outside the gate and he’s crippled. Peter and John come along and he says, “*Alms.*” The apostles did not have any money. Look at (3:6) They were bit like that preacher when he went to cash his cheque and the cashier said, “*I hate to give you these old dirty notes.*” He said, “*That’s alright no germs could live on my salary.*” That’s the way they were. “*Silver and gold have I none,*” there was the **Absence of Money**, “*but such as I have give I thee*,” there was the **Presence of Power**. My if Peter was the first pope he was a pretty poor wasn’t he ?

Look at (3:7) Now the ***power was the Lord’s but the hand was Peters !*** Like Peter, have you personally become involved in the lives of crippled people ? Most of us would rather give some money and let others witness and get their hands dirty. But if you want to see spiritually lame men walking in this city, you yourself must become involved. Do you see what happened ? Look at (3:8) If you had gone over forty years and had never walked in your life, I have a feeling that you would come skipping and jumping into church on a Sunday morning. My this was ***The Cripple who Danced in Church !*** A Miracle. Well you say, “*Preacher do you have the power to perform a miracle like that ?*” No, I don’t and I’m not expected to have.

My these were the works of an apostle. Look at, (2:43 5:12) You see God gave the apostles certain powers to authenticate the message of the gospel. Paul

wrote to the Corinthians “*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.*” (2 Cor 12:12) Look at, (Heb 2:3-4) B. B. Warfield correctly observed that the miraculous gifts “*were not for the possession of the primitive Christian as such: nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic Age for themselves: they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it..*”

Now these miraculous sign gifts included the gift of healing (Matt 10:1) exercised in this passage. This is one of many healings done by the apostles (2:43) selected for its impact and connection to Peter's sermon.

This gift of healing helped the apostles proclaim their message. My it is crucial to understand the impact of what Peter said and the effect of the healing miracle on his audience. You see Peter was talking to Jewish people who had been looking eagerly for their Messiah all their lives. Suppose Peter had walked in and simply told them, “*Jesus Christ, the one you crucified a few months ago He was your Messiah. Believe in Him.*”

We cannot begin to imagine how shocking and repulsive that message would have been to a first century Jew. It would have been utterly unthinkable to him that His Messiah would be crucified like a common criminal. A typical Jew believed the Messiah

was to come in power and glory to sweep away the bondage of the hated Romans who held the land in their grip. My had Peter not performed the miracle of healing the lame man, he would have had little or no audience.

As it was, many were shaken and pierced to their hearts.

According to (4:4) “ *Many of them which heard the Word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand.*” You see at Pentecost the church was born. A new era had come, and God gave miraculous abilities to his apostles to help them proclaim their message. ***But this gift of healing was a temporary sign gift for the authenticating of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Once that authenticity was established, the gift of healing ceased.*** Unfortunately, there is much confusion about this gift. Many today claim to possess or have access to the gift of healing. Their so-called healings run the gamut from psychological ploys to outright fakes to demonic activity.

(Matt 7:22 Mk 13:22 2 Thes 2:9)

Moreover so many so-called faith healers succumb to sickness without finding healing. William Branham father of the post World War 2 healing revival, a man reputed to have been instrumental in some of the most spectacular healings the movement has ever seen, died in 1965 at age 56 after suffering for 6 days from injuries received in a car accident. A. A. Allen, famed tent evangelist and faith healer, died of sclerosis of the liver in 1967, having secretly struggled with

alcoholism for many of the years he was supposedly healing others. Kathryn Kuhlman died of heart failure in 1976. She had battled with heart disease for nearly 20 years. Ruth Carter Stapleton, faith-healing sister of former USA

President Jimmy Carter, refused medical treatment for cancer because of her belief in faith healing. She died of the disease in 1983. Even John Wimber who wrote the book “ *Power Healing,*” had a damaged heart. Why is it that so many of the leading advocates of faith healing are themselves in need of healing ? Do the methods used by modern faith-healers coincide with those used in the New Testament ? How did the apostles heal ? Did they book appearances on popular television shows ? Did they appear with their subjects on a talk show ?

Now I believe that Peter's healing of this lame man and the apostle's ministry of healing gives us a measure by which we can evaluate faith-healing ministries today. How did the apostles heal ?

(a) The Apostles healed with a WORD or TOUCH:

Look at (3:7) there was contact with this man. In (9:32-35) Peter healed a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden eight years because he was paralysed. All Peter said was, “ *Aeneas, Jesus Christ made thee whole, arise and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.*” (28:8) (a)

(b) The Apostles healed INSTANTLY:

This beggar at the Temple Gate came immediately to his feet and started leaping, walking, and praising God. Look at (3:7) There was no need for any therapy, no extra rehabilitation. The man was cured at once after a lifetime of lameness.

(c) The Apostles healed COMPLETELY:

We see this here in the account of this lame man, and also in the healing of Aeneas in (9:34) Like every healing the Lord Jesus did, (Lk 4:39) every healing of the apostles was complete. There was no progression, no talk of recurring symptoms or slow improvement. There was no recuperation period. No taking it easy for a few weeks. It was not only instantaneous but total.

(d) The Apostles were able to heal ANYONE:

Unlike so called healers today, the apostles did not long leave long lines of disappointed people who had to return home in their wheelchairs. Look at (5:12-16) My No-one was left out.

(e) The Apostles healed ORGANIC DISEASE:

Dr. William Nolen is a medical doctor, who some years ago tested the claims of faith healers. Dr. Nolen explains the important distinction between functional and organic disease. He says, “***A functional disease is one in which a perfectly good organ does not function properly. An organic disease is one in which the organ is diseased, maimed, physically impaired, or even defunct. Infections, heart attacks, gallstones,***

hernias, slipped discs, cancers of all kinds, broken bones, congenital deformities and lacerations are all included in the organic disease class.” Dr. Nolen claims faith healers cannot cure organic diseases.

One thing is sure the apostles did. They did not go and up down Israel healing lower back pain, heart palpitations, headaches and other invisible ailments. This man at the Temple gate was in his forties, and he was crippled from birth. In (28:8) Publius's father was lying in bed with a bad case of fever and dysentery, an infectious organic disease. Paul went into see him, prayed, laid his hands on him, and healed him. Finally,

(f) The Apostles RAISED the DEAD:

Do you recall how Peter brought Dorcas back to life ? And that miracle gave credence and impact to the gospel message for we read, “*And it was known throughout all Joppa: and many believed in the Lord.*” (9:42 20:9-12) Where are the so-called healers in Ulster who can raise the dead ? I notice that people who tout the gift of healing today do not spend much time in funeral parlours, funeral processions, or cemeteries. The reason is obvious !

“*But incredible things are happening: how do you explain it ?*” “*I know this lady who had cancer and*” “*I know this person who was so bent over with arthritis she couldn't move and,*” How do you explain it ? Let me turn the question around to the charismatics. “***How do you explain it ?***” Since none of the healers today can heal with a word or touch,

instantly, totally, everybody, organic diseases, and raise the dead. How do you explain it ?

It certainly is not the Biblical gift of healing. Does God then heal today ? Absolutely ! But the Biblical gift of healing is not present. My God heals whom He wills, when He wills. Genuine healings may come as a result of prayer and most often involve simple natural processes. But the gift of healing, the ability to heal others, healings that can be “ *claimed*,” have no Biblical sanction in the post-apostolic era. 1.2.

(3) THE MESSAGE

Can you imagine the shock wave of whispers, gasps, and stares that spread though the Temple that day ? Amazed onlookers crowd around, as the healed man clings to the apostles like a baby animal to his mother.

Who caused the miracle ? What does it mean ? The people's thoughts immediately focus on Peter and John.

But Peter speaks up, shining the spotlight on Christ. Notice that:

(a) ***THERE WAS EXPLANATION:***

Look at (3:12-13) Peter is saying, “ *You want to know who did this ?* ” “ *Jesus, you have still got the Lord Jesus on you hands. I mean this Christ, that you denied, that you delivered up to be crucified, this Saviour whom you thought was finished, He's the One who healed him.* ” You see they could not get rid of the

Lord Jesus. Like the man who bought a new boomerang and killed himself trying to throw the old one away. Christ kept coming back. Peter claims none of the credit. Jesus is the one who performed this miracle. (a)

(b) ***THERE WAS DECLARATION:***

Do you recall that on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached the first sermon in the church's history ? The theme of that sermon was Jesus Christ. The theme of this message is Jesus Christ. Peter begins to preach and He presents Christ as:

(1) A RISEN LORD: (3:15)

My there's more evidence that Jesus Christ came out of that tomb than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived. Dr. Luke says, “ *He showed Himself after His passion by many infallible proofs.* ” (1:3) (1)

(2) A RESIDING LORD:

(3:16) “ *Listen Israel it is through the name of Jesus that this miracle has happened.* ” Many people decide who and what you are when they hear your name. Names come to stand for one's character and power. Peter did this miracle on the basis of what Christ is His name. Oh, He's not an absentee Lord, but a Residing Lord.

(3) A REDEEMING LORD:

(3:18) My this thing was not done in a corner, but it was done as God said it would be done throughout the centuries, it was all a fulfilment of prophecy. And now according to (3:19) you can be saved. Do you want to be saved ? Do you want to be spiritually healed ? Well, you must repent, which is a change of mind which issues in a change of behaviour. My have you repented of your sin ?

(4) A RETURNING LORD:

(3:20-21) Do you see what Peter is saying here ? He's saying that the millennial kingdom will follow the nations repentance, and until that time, Christ will remain in heaven. (Joel 2:25) My (a) and then was (b) Finally,

(c) THERE WAS INVITATION:

Look at (3:19) What will happen if these people repent and believe in Christ ? Their sins will be blotted out. The picture is that of wiping ink off a document. Is this what has happened you ? Can you sing, “ My sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought,” No wonder the name of Jesus was heralded by the apostles.

There is POWER in that Name:

For God Himself regards that name as indispensable in the salvation of sinners. Indeed it is Peter who says, “ Neither is there salvation in any other saved.” Have you faith in that name in that person and work ?

There is PERSECUTION in that Name:

In (5:41) we read that the apostles “ departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (9:16)

There is PRIDE in that Name:

Paul suffered greatly for Christ but do you know something ? He was prepared for anything for that name's sake. “ I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” (21:13) My I have a desire to bring honour to that name. Do you feel that way ? Let me give you a verse in closing, “ Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Tim 2:19)