

A HEALING AND ITS RESULTS

Acts 3

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We've been in Acts for about five nights and we've gone through two chapters. We'll pick up the tempo just a little bit (Acts 3 and 4). If you're outlining this, let me give you some hooks and handles as to where we are.

I. The birth of the church.

A. From the resurrection to Pentecost, that's Acts 1. That covers the events of Jesus' ministry following His resurrection. Then the gathering of the church after the ascension, waiting for the Day of Pentecost.

B. Day of Pentecost, Acts 2 and the fallout from the Day of Pentecost is reflected in the indispensable characteristic of a biblical and a restoration church. We finished looking at that last week, some thirteen great and vital characteristics of the church.

C. This chapter 3 and chapter 4 would constitute subpoint C. Which would be called—not very glamorous—but we'll just stick to the straight stuff: “A Healing and Its Results.”

As we begin to explore this particular section of Scripture, we should immediately notice, as we're flipping through our Bible, that there is more time devoted to this particular healing and to the results that flow out of it than any of the previous sections that we've already looked at thus far in the Book of Acts. I always find it fascinating to see what biblical writers devote their time to. Often they place a greater emphasis on something; if you or I were writing the text, we would perhaps put the allocation of resource in another area. For example, it's fascinating to me how the full one fourth of the Book of Acts, as we come to the end, is devoted to Paul's prison experience. I wouldn't have devoted that much time to that. I would have liked to have chapter

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after chapter of miracles and preaching and fantastic things like that. Yet the Scripture says that God is keenly aware of us when we're going through times of apparent unproductivity in our life. When it appears like we're being put on the shelf. God's focus is upon us there as well. It's not just the great days of miracles that God is concerned to note, it's also the times when we are tested tremendously.

But here, this evening, is a miracle. We know that there were a lot of miracles within the Early Church. Acts 2 has told us that. But this is the only healing miracle in the first seven chapters of Acts. That to me is somewhat surprising in view of how many were occurring. The reason why it alone is specifically fleshed out in detail for us is that it comes at a critical moment in the life of the church and it spins the church in a new direction. It is, therefore, what we might call a "hinge" moment, something that really makes a change or a transition in our life. If it hadn't been for that event, we wouldn't be where we are today—one of those kinds of things.

Out of this miracle flows the first preaching of the gospel to the Sanhedrin. That group had convicted and sentenced Jesus to death. Out of this miracle comes the first imprisonment of the leadership of the church: Peter and John, and the fact that the church is going to have to reposition and identify itself on the question of suffering. For always, until that time, in the Old Testament—with the exception of Job and Habakkuk primarily—the verdict had been that if you suffer, there is something that was at fault in your life. Now we have the introduction of the theme that when you are doing right, that may be in fact the reason you are suffering—because you are being loyal to Jesus. So it's a very "hinge" passage of Scripture that's very important.

As we look at it in detail, let's just pause to look, word-for-word and phrase-by-phrase. "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1). That appears to be a straightforward statement, but there's far more involved in that statement than what may be on

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the surface. It shows us that the Early Church was still participating in all the institutions of Jewish worship that were in practice prior to the coming of Christ. The temple had, as its primary center of activity, animal sacrifice. There were two times in any given day when sacrifice was offered on behalf of all the people. In between those two times, individuals or families came to offer specific sacrifices. But once in the morning and once in the afternoon, a sacrifice called a whole burnt offering was offered up for all the people of Israel as a consecration of the life of the nation in perpetuity to God. Never should a day go by in which the nation as a whole was not presented to God. And it was in relationship to that hour of prayer that Peter and John were going to the temple.

From our vantage point of looking at the New Testament, we know that Hebrews came along and said to us that we have a better sacrifice, we have a better altar, we have a better priesthood, we have a better sanctuary and we have a better temple. Therefore, the external realities of temple, priesthood, altar and sacrifice came to be done away with because Christ had completed those things and now we do not need animal sacrifices, physical temples and Levitical priesthoods. But at this moment in the birth of the church, the church is still walking in all of those ways. Christ, the perfect sacrifice, has been given, yet the church and its leadership is present at the hour of sacrifice.

You would grow out of these things, as we'll see as we watch the Book of Acts develop. One of the important developments that comes out in Acts, which is often not apparent as you read it, is that the church, if it is going to reach the world, must seriously look at what it is doing and strip from its life that which is peculiarly cultural without being gospel. Christ has come to end sacrifice. And the Early Church is going to be taught that, ultimately, it must grow out of this way, but old habits die-hard. We do not always, at the first instance of coming to Christ, see all

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the implications and changes He's going to make in our life. The idea that the minute we come to Christ suddenly we have as a gift from heaven a complete set of ideas that are dropped into our mind and that we think straight thereafter. We know completely thereafter. There's no development of our life and faith. That whole idea is shot when we open Acts 3:1 and find that even Peter and John are going to learn much about the finished work of Christ, that they do not even yet know or have not appropriated. They're going to grow into that.

I think it's encouraging to note the fact that we don't have everything fully formed either in our doctrine or in our behavior when we begin understanding the implications of the Resurrection. Christ reveals Himself to us on the way.

They're coming at the hour of prayer. As is so often the case in the Book of Acts, and perpetually in the life of the church, so many things happen when either individuals or the church as a whole prays. It was because the church was gathered together for ten days of prayer that it was positioned to receive the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And indeed, in our own lives, we do not receive God's Spirit flowing deeply in our lives without there being availability on our part to God in prayer and saying, "O Lord, I'm hungry! I'm available." Spending time with Him. I am not one of those persons who go along with the mechanical view of the baptism of Holy Spirit. That all you've got to do to receive the gift of the Spirit is come down in front and have a preacher say three or four funny sounds and you repeat that after him and suddenly you find yourself speaking in tongues and you go out. I realize that for some people that may be a release of their faith but there is no substitute for intensive communication with God on a personal level, where we open our life in deep ways to God and simply pour out our hearts to Him.

Here in Acts 3, we find again the church gathering for prayer. It is at the time of prayer, in the temple, in a public place, that God's going to do a very significant act. He's going to do it

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through His sovereignty, through the operation of the gift of faith in Peter and John and to a man who was laying there crippled from birth, being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful. He was put there every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

I may not get any further than that this evening. I don't know I'm not going to give you kind of an unending message; maybe we'll get further than that. I want to pause there for just a moment because, for one thing, I've had a tough time in my life knowing how to minister to beggars.

Anyone, again, who's traveled in the third world, knows how tough that is. What should you do for a beggar? I had a devastating experience a few months ago. To me it was devastating. I was in Hong Kong late at night with my cousin, David Plymire, who's a missionary there. We came up out of a subway and there was a little old blind lady there, probably sixty-five or seventy years of age, very deformed, sitting on her haunches with a little tin cup, begging for money in ritzy-glitzzy Hong Kong. I looked at my cousin; my cousin looked at me and he said, "What hope does this person have in life?" The problem of being a beggar staggers you. What are you going to do about that? Especially when you don't have the gift of faith that Peter had or seemingly the operation of the sovereignty of God's power. If every Christian, when they saw someone in the evident weakness of a beggar who was blind or crippled as was the case here, had the power to say to them, "Such as I have, get up and walk," there would have been eradication of social problems in this world centuries ago, just because of the activity of the church. I'm not sure that it's always the church's fault, the Christian's fault, or that it's always a lack of faith that accounts for why people like that go on in the same state.

In this particular case, we see a manifestation of the unique gift of faith happening through Peter and through John. The church has come to recognize that it must say more. If it cannot say to the beggar, "Get up and walk," it must still say to the beggar, "Such as I have, give I to thee." And

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it's always going to be the case. In any great revival of the church, there are going to be people missed by that revival, no matter how much God is doing, there is still going to be needy people left in tremendous extremities of life. The Jerusalem church, at this particular moment in its experience, could have sat back and said, "We're having a wonderful revival in Jerusalem. We've got thousands of people coming to the Lord. We have miracles occurring everywhere around us. Let's just have perpetual testimony services and let's just wait for the Lord to come again." But no matter how great the revival was, there were still people like this guy at the Gate Beautiful. What a contrast—a beggar at a beautiful building and a gate. We as the body of Christ have a responsibility to find that person and do what we can in the name of the Lord.

We closed, last Sunday night service, by taking some moments to focus upon the people who might be classified as beggars in our society. To me, a beggar is anyone who cannot help themselves. Who is involved in a situation in life that has so debilitated them that they cannot come out and live a meaningful, normal, and self-sustaining existence. They're dependent upon others. They're dependent upon something other than God or the initiative and creativity He's given to their life.

So we prayed for alcoholics. And we prayed for drug abusers. And we prayed for broken families. And we prayed for whole categories of people. One of the things we shared in our staff meeting this week, as we were praying and talking about that message is, what are we going to do about it? Now that we've prayed, what are we going to do? Are we just going to pray and let it go? Or are we going to do something about it?

One of our church parishioners came in to talk to me this last week and said, "Pastor, are you aware of the problems Orange County Teen Challenge has been having?" I said to her, "No, I'm really not." She said, "We became aware that we had a child that was drug-dependent. We found

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that the ministry and that center has helped to revolutionize our child's life." Terry and Alice are serving in Orange County Teen Challenge. Alice is a lawyer and Terry is a hospital medical equipment salesman. Both of them drawing great salaries and very well ensconced, professional positions; felt the call of God on their life to give it all away and come serve as directors of Orange County Teen Challenge. This parishioner in our church said to me, "Do you realize that there are times when they don't have anything to eat and there are whole programs that are being developed by that center to reach teenagers on drugs and some of those programs have had to go undone because they have not been funded? And that the center is on a day-to-day basis as to whether or not it's even going to make it. We have how many churches in Orange County? We have forty Assembly of God churches; God knows how many Baptist, Four Square, Vineyards or whatever else. As far as I know, it may be the only Spirit-filled Christian drug rehabilitation center in Orange County, and the waiting list of people who want to get off drugs is so stacked up in any Teen Challenge Center in this state that people are waiting for months and months. A parent has a sixteen-year-old and that sixteen-year-old is in a desperate condition because they're on drugs and they want to get them into Teen Challenge. The answer so often is, "I'm sorry we have no vacancy. It'll be months." A child on drugs can't wait months. We know from experience with the Teen Challenge drug rehabilitation program that it has the highest cure rate of any program in the world. It relies totally on prayer. It doesn't rely on methadone. It relies on, "In the name of Jesus, we say to you, rise up, take up your bed and walk." It just so gripped me to think that I, as a pastor, can be comfortable in a church in this area, such as the one we have and yet there are literally by the score, the beggars in our community. And people go away not being helped.

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I had a call this week from Bill Wilson in New York. Bill hasn't called me in a few months. Bill said to me, "Hi Pastor." I said, "Hi Bill, what are you doing?" He said, "Oh, I'm here." I said, "Is everything ok?" He didn't answer me. Then I heard him crying on the other end of the phone. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I just can't talk. I just want you to know I love you and I was thinking about you. I want you to ask the church to keep praying for me."

We just simply can't afford, as a church in Orange County, to get satisfied with however many people we find inside the building on any given situation. There are more people in this community on drugs tonight than could possibly fit in every church in the community. There are more alcoholics alone in Lido Island and Balboa Island that would pack this church ten times on a Sunday. As we shared and prayed in staff, I don't know all the answers. Except I know the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a liberating power. Jesus breaks bonds and sets people free. I don't know how to develop all the programs to bring this off. I want to get behind programs, however, and I want to encourage you to volunteer your time and get involved in Teen Challenge Orange County or give or do something. But I want to see God do something to move our hearts and motivate us to do something for the beggars in our midst. Because we can get used to their presence and never do a single thing.

That beggar lay at the gate everyday. He was part of the landscape and he got so into the landscape that I wonder if anybody had eyes for him anymore.

Maybe there could have been just a tad of accusatoriness by Peter and John when they saw him; they could have said, "Hey buddy, we've been going back and forth from this gate twice a day everyday. Lots of people have been healed in this temple. Don't you know in the Gospel of Matthew 21 [Of course, he wouldn't have known that because the Gospel of Matthew hadn't yet been written] Jesus was in the temple area, and what was he doing? He was healing the lame and

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the blind. Man, if you're laying here today and you're over forty years of age; it was just a few months ago, He was here. It was his Passion Week. Where were you the day He was healing all the lame and the blind? Man, you've missed it haven't you? Where have you been with all the action that's been going on around this place?" They could have just said to him, "Look, you're one of those incorrigibles that can't be helped." Or they could have just simply ignored him; evidently, he had just been there.

But when God begins to work powerfully in a people, they begin to see things they have not seen before. We begin to see people we haven't seen before. We begin to see issues we haven't seen before. And we come out of a sense of complacency and "business as usual" to get really on with the work the kingdom is about. The church is not a museum. It's a lifeguard station. In that lifeguard station, we have a responsibility before God and the community to take our perch and see who's in trouble. If we don't see that, then we have a responsibility to wait on God until He begins to show us who's in trouble, and to ask God to put the ministries and more important than the ministries, the heartthrob of people among us whom God will raise up to minister to the community.

I'd like, someday, to step into this sanctuary at a meeting in which the only people who could come would be converted and delivered alcoholics. Then an hour later, I'd like to come into this room and meet with people who had been on drugs and had been converted and delivered. And then, we would go right down the list. But if in our hour of prayer we don't expect that to happen or we don't ask the Lord for that to happen, or we're not thinking in those directions, then other things get on our agenda of life. We talk about, "What did you think of the worship? Do you like singing from a hymnal or do you like singing choruses?" Who cares?

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I mean, seriously! (This is what happens when I go without notes.) I'm going to really get in trouble now. Someone sent me a note. I struggle as a pastor, quite frankly, with anonymous notes. I'll just tell you that right out front. Because I think if you have something to say, I would love to see you personally, face-to-face. You need to buckle up the courage for confrontation and do it. I got a note that said, "When we sang a hymn today (we sung one hymn, it was "How Great Thou Art") I sure wished we could worship God instead." Something to that effect. I was like whoa, whoa, whoa!

This is what happens in the body of Christ. Instead of talking about how can we get drug-addict Joe to church, what do we do as a Christian community? I do it too. It's not just you. We talk about "this style of worship is better than that style of worship." Who cares, as long as it's worship? "They who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). I've found that some of the people who worship the Lord, who worship Him most sincerely, don't worship Him in a way that I'm accustomed to.

We're tempted to go away and judge a service on some aesthetic value, or whether the PA system was set right. I believe the devil inhabits church sound systems. I mean, there are demons lurking in electronic wires that are just waiting to foul this up. You could put a hundred people in a room and you are going to have a hundred different needs of levels of sound. We get introspective as a church. It's so easy to fall into. Then we begin talking about personalities. You can't be in a church very long before you see that this person doesn't like that person, that individual has their agenda, and the other person has their agenda. If this goes on, it can begin to destroy this first love, innocence and commitment to the Lord and the vitality of being filled with the Spirit that's so critical for the church to accomplish its true mission, which is to reach out and to win.

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Jesus came to seek and save the lost. One of my greatest weaknesses is that I have not had, up until this time in my ministry, the gift of an evangelist. I believe I have the gift of teaching. But I've always wanted the gift of evangelism along with teaching. If God won't give me the gift of evangelism, will He at least give it to a bunch of other people in this church, so the people who are represented by the category of beggar in our society can find a messenger of Jesus saying to them, "Such as I have give I to you." A whole tremendous world changes for them. The most important thing that can happen in any given week in the life of this church is for someone or for many people to come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's the single most important thing. For it to happen, we must begin to be conscious of the need for praying and being aware of persons that we know or can touch that do not know Christ.

Peter and John are going to the temple at the hour of prayer. But they're not so busy praying that they don't see someone there who needs the Lord. They stop and they minister to that person and take him right along with them, walking, leaping, and praising God.

I'd love to get into the whole other thing that Peter says. "Silver and gold have I none," but I'm going to stop right there, because I feel again constrained that I call the church continually to an atmosphere and Spirit of intercession to ask, "O God, help us be that kind of people who will be aware of the beggars in our midst."

Closing Prayer

Lord, before we look at that, there may be someone here this evening who is every bit as much in need as that man in the gospel story. They're in a beautiful place this evening. But their life is racked by needs so great they do not have the resources to meet those needs. I pray, Lord Jesus, in these moments, as we your church are gathered together that Your Holy Spirit will come into their heart and life and minister the resurrection power of Jesus. We ask, Lord Jesus, that You be

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present to save, to deliver, to set free. We ask, Lord Jesus, that Your power settle upon us as a people to reach out, to care, to minister. Only Your Spirit can direct us. We ask, Lord Jesus, not for more human-generated programs that consume so much energy and deliver so little. We ask that You will birth in our hearts ministries within this people tonight that will have impact and power in this world for You. That You will meet us in this place of prayer and put a vision and heartbeat in us for the needy and the lost. Lord, we ask it in Your name. Amen.