

We are Witnesses

Acts 3:1-26

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

Ames, Iowa

July 18, 2021

When do you expect God to do something amazing? Is it when you have planned? Is it because you have put it on your calendar? Is it when you have prepared? Is it because you deserve it?

Often, Jesus does amazing things in our lives when we least expect it and when we least deserve it. Often, He does them in the ordinary moments of our lives. Often it is a simple, quiet time or sitting in church singing or praying or listen to the sermon being preached. Sometimes it is when we least expect it that God shows up in a miraculous way in our lives.

You probably have had those moments. Perhaps it was when you got saved. You're just going through life with no specific issues or problems, and then someone shared the gospel with you, and you realized you needed Jesus. Perhaps you prayed a prayer and didn't think much of it, but then God answered abundantly above all that you could ask or think. Perhaps it was just an ordinary moment in a church worship service where the Spirit of God broke through and left you forever changed. Perhaps it was that Sunday that a sin that had been a particular struggle was killed, and new love and affection for Jesus grew in its place. Perhaps it was just an ordinary time in your small group where everyone is sharing, and then the next thing you know, you are pouring out your heart to your group, and they are praying for you. All of the sudden, you realize in a new and fresh way that you have a church family that loves you.

This is kind of what we find in Acts 3. As the chapter opens, it seems just like an ordinary day. Peter and John are going to the temple for the usual hour of prayer. The beggar in the story was doing what he usually did. He was camped outside the Beautiful Gate of the temple, begging for money. On this ordinary day at that ordinary moment, Peter and John showed up, and he asked them for money. He got more than he bargained for in that request, as we will see.

Acts 3 breaks down into three natural sections. Section one is vv. 1-10, section two is vv. 11-16 and section three is vv. 17-26. We are going to follow this as our outline of the text and draw our points from this breakdown.

I. Witnesses have compassion on the needy (vv. 1-10)

We do not know how much time has passed between the end of Acts 2 and the opening of Acts 3. But at the end of Acts 2, we see the early church living life together, and then Acts 3 opens with Peter and John going to the temple to pray.

As they came to the Beautiful Gate, a man who was a cripple from birth was at the gate begging. We know from Acts 4:22 that the man was not young. He was over 40 years old, and begging was his only means of support.

To be a beggar was a miserable life. If he was like most beggars, he lived in shame. As one commentator said, "*The man in view here is not simply broke. He's broken. He's physically crippled. He's humiliated. He's hopeless.*"¹

The Jews thought one of two things about a crippled beggar like this man. They thought he was being punished for some sin he committed, or he was being punished for his parent's sin. Bottom line: To be in this

¹ Tony Merida, *Christ-centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Acts*, 47.

condition is to be desperate beyond imagination because all he could do was beg. So, when he saw Peter and John, he did what he usually did, he asked them for money.

Notice what happened when he asked them for money in v. 4,

And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

It sounds like all they did was told the man to look at them, but in the Greek, the language is much stronger. The Greek says that Peter and John *intently stared at the man*. Then they charged the man to look at them. They wanted eye contact.

After the man fixed his attention on Peter and John, notice what Peter said in v. 6 says:

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!"

Peter and John knew what the man needed most, and he did not need silver and gold. He needed Jesus. So, they gave him the one thing they had—Jesus.

Then in vv. 7-8, we see the beautiful miracle done at the Beautiful Gate:

⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

All the people there saw him and recognized him. They knew he had been crippled his whole life. They knew he was always at the gate begging. Look at their response in v. 10:

And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

The people at the temple were filled with wonder and amazement. They were blown away by this miracle.

What we need to understand about this miracle is that this miracle was not an end in itself. The crippled man's problem was everyone's problem, and the healing he received was the healing we all need. So, with that in mind, let's make some applications.

First, we need to understand that all people are needy and broken by sin. Although the crippled beggar desired alms to relieve his condition, the truth is he needed more than money. Most likely, he didn't think there was any hope for healing, and so he was trapped in his life of begging.

Brothers and sisters, even as Christian, we can drift into the crippled beggar's condition. When we are in misery or suffering, we often think our lives will never change. When we are having hard struggles in our marriages, in parenting of our children, in our family relationships, or perhaps we are having conflict with a friend or friends we tend to believe this is how it is and it will never change. It can be the same way in our jobs. If work is miserable, we tend to believe it will always be miserable from now on and never change. To think like this is to give in to hopelessness and despair. When we give in to hopelessness and despair it will cripple us spiritually. We forget the riches of Christ that have been given to us and believe we are spiritual beggars looking for crumbs.

It is in these moments we need the Father of glory *to give us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. We need to have the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that so that we may know and remember the hope to which he has called us. We need to remember the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. This power comes to us by the*

Spirit through our faith in the person and work of Christ. Quite simply, we need to get back to the basics of our faith in Jesus and the riches of spiritual life He has given us in His church.

If you're not a Christian, then you need to understand the beggar's condition is your condition. Sin has crippled and broken not only this world but your life as well. The fact is unless you look to Jesus to heal, you are in danger of dying in this condition and going to hell.

But I've got good news for you. You need to know that Jesus took your brokenness upon Himself when He died on the cross to pay for your sin, and all who look to Jesus will be healed and raised to walk in a new life in Christ. So, if you are here and you are tired of how sin has crippled your life, look to Jesus and be healed. Stop begging for the scraps of this world and look to Christ as your Treasure.

A second application is that Christians serve the needy by giving the needy Jesus. I don't think Peter's response to the man's request means he and John were opposed to giving money to the poor. I think it means they knew this man needed more than money.

As Christians, we are witnesses, and we give what we can. Sometimes we may not be able to give money. Sometimes we do not need to give money. However, we can always give the needy the gospel.

The principle is that everything we do in benevolent work is in order to advance the gospel so, *whether we give money to the needy or not, we always give in order to share the gospel because Jesus is always a needy person's greatest need.*

Our final application builds on the last one: Advancing the gospel is God's goal. So, here are some of the questions to set up the application: *Shouldn't we always pray for a miracle when we see someone who needs healing? Why doesn't God always perform a miracle?*

Christians are divided on this issue, but I think the answer to this question is: Yes, we should pray for healing, and we should pray for a miracle. Yet, we must also remember that God is sovereign. God sometimes gives miraculous healing. Other times His plan is not to heal. There is nothing wrong with praying for healing. Suppose someone in your family has cancer then pray for God to heal them. However, we must always trust God regardless of the answer He gives.

Sometimes it is not God's will to heal a person. The Apostle Paul prayed for healing, and yet he did not receive it. God's purpose in not healing the Apostle Paul was for God's glory and the advancement of the gospel through Paul's life.

Here is what we learn in vv. 1-10 through the healing of the cripple in vv. 1-10. The salvation of sinners and the advance of the gospel is always God's goal. That was the purpose of the miracle.

Bottom line: *Sometimes God gives miraculous physical healing to advance the gospel, and sometimes He does not. Both are for the advance of the gospel. We must trust that His purposes are good and know that they always are for advancing the gospel.*

II. Witnesses explain the person and work of Jesus (vv. 11-16)

In vv. 11-16, Peter explains who Jesus is and the fact they the Jews missed him due to their ignorance. Peter's explanation of the person and work of Christ is not simply instructive but also an indictment.

Look in v. 12. Notice what Peter said:

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 point of his rhetorical question is that they should have recognized the miracle. Verse 17 tells us why they didn't recognize the miracle:

And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as also did your rulers.

Peter was not sympathetic to their ignorance. Their ignorance was due to their hard hearts. Let's unpack what they were ignorant of in vv. 12-16:

1. First, they were ignorant of God's word. Verse 12 says,

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 implication of v. 12 is that their ignorance of the Old Testament prophecies led to them missing Jesus as the Messiah.

Peter did not soft-peddle their sin of ignorance. He explained who Jesus was from the Old Testament so they would see how the healing of this man pointed to Jesus as the Messiah that they crucified. They needed to see their sin of ignorance in light of God's word. It was this ignorance that led to them killing Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, the only way to understand that we are sinners is to go to God's word. Stay with me here, I don't want to lose you. Unless you have lived in a cave the last couple of years, you have probably heard of *Critical Theory or Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality*. These are worldviews and philosophies of life that are being pushed in order to reshape our government, our laws, and our educational systems.

Here is what you need to know. These ungodly worldviews redefine sin and salvation. If you listen to the preachers of these worldviews, you will become ignorant of God's word and thus ignorant of what sin is. The preachers of *critical theory and intersectionality* tell us that all we need to do is read the right sociology books and read the right psychology books to understand sin.

Preachers of *critical theory and intersectionality* tell us that it is the color of your skin, your gender, or the hegemonic mindset of your socio-economic class that makes you a sinner. *In short, they teach that the color of your skin is your sin.*

Friends, if we are ignorant of sin, we will be ignorant of salvation. God's word is sufficient to teach us what sin is and who the Savior is. Bottom line: *We must know what sin is according to God's word, and when we do, we will know that salvation is only found in Jesus. When we know the Savior, then our wonder will be in the right place, for we will be in awe that He died for our sin in order to save us.*

2. Second, in v. 13, they were ignorant to the fact that they killed the promised *Suffering Servant*. You see, ignorance of sin leads to ignorance of salvation. Peter had to show them where salvation is found. Notice what he did. He went back to the Old Testament to show them, Jesus.

The list of the patriarchs in v. 13 shows that Jesus was the long-awaited *Suffering Servant* of Isaiah 53 Yahweh had promised to send. The Greek word for *servant* in v. 13 is the same word used to identify the *Suffering Servant* in Isaiah 53. Look in v. 13,

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 had decided to release him.

Verse 13 is kind of a good news/bad news verse for the Jews. It is good news that Jesus is the *Suffering Servant* whom God glorified and sent Him to die on the cross to pay for their sins. The bad news is you are the ones who killed him. Bottom line: *ignorant of God's word will lead you to kill your only hope of redemption.*

3. But there is more bad news in v. 14: They killed the Holy and Righteous One.

Not only did they kill the Holy and Righteous One, but they also persuaded Pilate to release a murderer in His place. Look in v. 14:

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you

The title *Holy and Righteous One* for Jesus is also a title that comes from Isaiah 53. It is the divine title of the sinless Suffering Messiah who came to pay for the sins of His people on the cross. *But, again, we see that ignorance of God's word will lead you to kill your only hope of redemption.*

4. Then there is more bad news in v. 15: they killed the *Author of Life*:

Jesus' title, *the Author of Life*, is a title found four times in the New Testament. It can also be translated as *Prince of Life*. The title means that Jesus has authority over all of life. He is the Sovereign God over all of life.

We might ask: *How does one kill the One who has authority over all of life?* It can only happen in this way. They could not kill Him unless He has decided to lay His life down for those whom He loves and plans to save.

This was exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He laid His life down for those who were dead in their sin and because He gave His sinless life as a sacrifice on the cross.

Although He willingly gave His life as a sacrifice on the cross, those who killed Him were still responsible for their sinful actions.

Here is what we know from Scripture. We, here this morning, are just as guilty of killing the *Author of Life* as the ones who called for His execution. No one is exempt. It is our sin that sent Jesus, the *Author of Life*, to the cross, and yet, it was also the will of God to crush Him for our sin. Friends, do not miss this truth because ignorance of God's word will lead to your destruction.

5. Finally, in the last part of v. 15, we find the good news:

*God raised [Him] from the dead.
To this we are witnesses.*

Although it was our sin that sent *the Author of Life* to the cross, God raised Him from the dead so that by our faith in Him, we may be saved. Look in v. 16:

*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.*

The crippled man was not healed by Peter and John but by his faith in Jesus Christ. His healing came by faith alone in Jesus alone.

Peter explained the meaning of the miracle so that all would see that by faith in Jesus, we can be saved. This is the meaning of the miracle.

If you are not a Christian, then you need to know that you too can be healed from your sinful ignorance through repentance of your sin of ignorance and by placing your faith in Jesus alone.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when we read a text like this, we need to be reminded that we are witnesses to the facts of Jesus Christ. It was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross, and we are saved by the faith that He has given us. Now we are called to do what Peter did, explain the person and work of Christ to a lost world. We are witnesses who explain the person and work of Christ and then call them to repent and believe in Jesus.

III. Witness call sinners to repent and believe in Jesus (vv. 17-26)

Verses 17-26 paint a picture of the right response to the preaching of the gospel? Look in vv. 19-20:

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

The proper response to the message of the gospel, whether you are a Christian or not a Christian is repentance and faith. We come to Christ through repentance and faith, and then as Christians, we live lives of repentance and faith in the Savior.

But what if you reject Jesus? Peter says that those who reject the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be destroyed. He made his point from Deuteronomy 18:18-19:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

¹⁹And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

God will require the life of those who reject Jesus means they will be judged and sentenced to Hell or as Peter said it in v. 23:

And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.

Let me close by saying, in all that Peter preached, He leaves us with a message of hope. Look back at vv. 19-20:

Repent therefore, and turn back that your sins may be blotted out,²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Friends, there is forgiveness of our sin through faith in Jesus. When we come to Christ in repentance and faith, what we find is refreshment and renewal. Repentance is often painted in a negative light. Because of their ignorance of God's word, they think repentance and faith is condemnation; really, it is refreshment and renewal.

Verses 25-26 is what repentance looked like for the Jews. Listen to what Peter told them:

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.'²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

In other words, they needed to change their minds about who Jesus was. He was the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham. He was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who was raised from the dead. God sent Him to them first and then to the Gentiles so that the promise of Abraham would be fulfilled.

If you are not a Christian, then the questions I want to leave you with this morning are: Have you changed your mind about Jesus? Have you repented of your sin? If you have not trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, why don't you turn from your sin and place your faith in Jesus this morning?

If you are a Christian, then be reminded that we are witnesses. Our charge is to go and make disciples of all nations.