

Chapter 3: Healing of the Lame Man; Peter's Second Sermon

Healing of the Lame Man (3:1-10)

It is not known how much time has passed between Pentecost and this account (3:1). Likely, it may have been weeks or even months. The “hour of prayer” refers to one of the Jewish times for prayer that correspond with the daily sacrifices (9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.). The “ninth hour” is reckoned from a 6:00 a.m. beginning point; thus, it means 3:00 p.m.¹ It is not at all unusual—or improper—for Jewish Christians to continue the Jewish habit of going to the temple at the usual times of prayer. Notice that anyone going to the temple goes “up” to it, even though it is not the highest elevation in the city. This connotation implies a certain ethical and spiritual quality to the temple, suggesting that simply by being there one is closer to God.²

On the way to the temple is a lame man who has never walked, though he is over 40 years old (3:2; see 4:22). He is, by any natural standard, incurably crippled. Friends carry him to a certain place where there will be a great amount of foot traffic, since he makes his living by collecting alms from the people. The Herodian temple courtyard has nine massive gates, all 45 feet high except for one, which is 75 feet high. It is possible that this highest gate is the “Beautiful” Gate, also known as the Nicanor Gate (named after the wealthy Alexandrian Jew who donated it), which is decorated with gold, silver, and Corinthian bronze.³ The temple area itself is massive (490 x 325 yards) and surrounded by an equally massive stone wall that towers over the Kidron Valley just outside the city. Blocks of limestone weighing up to several hundred tons apiece serve as its foundation, so finely engineered and positioned that a piece of paper cannot pass between them.⁴

Peter and John may well have been good friends from their youth; they also worked together in the fishing industry (Luke 5:10). They also were two of the three closest associates of Jesus, James being the third (Mark 5:37, 9:2, 13:3, 14:33, et al). It is not at all unusual to see them paired together as we do in this account. It is possible that Peter and John have seen (and helped?) this lame man before. However, there is no indication that they purposely approach this man in order to heal him; they are on their way to the temple for other reasons. Rather, it is the lame man himself who attracts the attention of Peter and John in his begging for alms (3:3).

Instead of money, Peter offers him something far better: the opportunity to *walk* (3:4-6). “In the name of Jesus Christ” (3:6) means by His *authority*, which Peter will explain later (in 3:12-16). “Nazarene” refers to the town in which Jesus grew up (Nazareth), with which the people have long associated Him.⁵ It is clear that the lame man does not understand what is being offered to

¹ See comments on 2:15.

² Adapted from Lenski, *Acts of the Apostles*, 124.

³ Coffman, *Commentary on Acts*, 67. See also Josephus, “Wars,” 5.5.2.

⁴ Paul Mitchell, “Acts of the Apostles and New Testament History” (unpublished; cited 2001), 3.2.

⁵ We should remember that Jesus did not have a very good reception in His own hometown after He had begun His ministry (see Mark 6:1-6); at one point, the people there tried to stone Him to death (Luke 4:24-30). Also, because of the low status of Nazareth in comparison to the purist culture of Jerusalem, “Nazarene” was used

him; Peter has to grab his hand and pull him to his feet (3:7). Instantly, however, the man is able to walk.⁶ What Peter gives to this man is more than what earthly or man-made wealth could ever purchase: the ability to be *made whole*, to function as a normal, healthy human being.⁷ Furthermore, the lame man not only leaps up on his own two feet, but he is immediately able to walk around without exercise or rehabilitation (3:8).⁸ The crowd's reaction to the miracle of the healing of the lame man is "wonder" and "amazement" (3:9-10). For *decades* they have seen this man lying helplessly, begging for alms—yet with a single command he is healed and leaping for joy!

Peter's Second Sermon (3:11-26)

Peter's accusation against the Jews (3:11-16)

The news of the lame man's healing electrifies the city, and people throng to the epicenter of attention: Peter, John, and the healed man himself (3:11). No doubt the man's own enthusiasm helps to fan the people's astonishment. The crowd is dumbfounded over what has occurred and seeks an explanation. This situation provides another ideal opportunity for Peter to proclaim the message of Christ. The "portico of Solomon" refers to a 60-foot-wide covered porch or colonnade on the eastern side of the Temple in Jerusalem, the roof of which was supported by a number of impressive pillars (John 10:23, Acts 5:12).

Peter first dismisses any of his *own* power or authority as the source of this man's healing (3:12). He immediately defers to Jesus Christ as the power behind the miracle. Notice how Peter links together "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"—a covenant-name expression—and "His servant Jesus" (3:13). Thus, Jesus' power to heal is from *the same God* that the Israelites have worshiped for centuries; God is therefore in full *support* of Jesus.⁹ This fact only heightens the

by some as a term of derision and ridicule (see John 1:46). Here, however, Peter uses it intentionally to show that a Man (Christ) with the power to heal congenital paralysis is hardly one who lacks power or credentials. Just as with the "word of the cross" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18), Christ makes that which is otherwise shameful into a badge of honor.

⁶ Literally (in the Greek), Peter says to the man, "Be walking!"—a present imperative indicating continuous action (Lenski, *Acts of the Apostles*, 128). In other words, this man will not only walk for the present time, but will "be walking" from this point forward. He is instantly, completely, and permanently healed of his lameness.

⁷ According to the Law, a lame man could not serve as a priest (Leviticus 21:18); by extension, a man who was not *physically whole* (or, intact) could not participate in the holy assemblies of Israel. Thus, this miracle demonstrates more than just Christ's power to heal; it symbolizes that no physical defect can prevent a person from entering into God's covenant of salvation (see Micah 4:6). This will be especially evident in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8.

⁸ "The first word [leap] is a present middle participle. He was leaping up and down repeatedly. This would be the natural expression resulting from his joy at being healed. The verb 'walk' is in the imperfect tense. He continued to walk around, just as he had been commanded to do" (Reese, *Book of Acts*, 155; bracketed word is mine). As a side note: one trade secret of every magician is to have full control over the environment in which he performs his magic tricks. (We see this even today with regard to the so-called "miracle workers" and "faith healers.") What is impressive here, as in all other bona fide miracles, is that there is no manipulation of the environment, no pulling the lame man aside to mask any sleight-of-hand, and no need for a number of stage hands to help pull off the stunt. A miracle is not a trick, magic act, or dramatic performance. It is a genuine display of supernatural power that cannot be naturally explained or humanly duplicated.

⁹ Remember that Jesus was crucified as an alleged blasphemer of God (Matthew 26:65-66). Also, by deferring to Jesus' power as being that which healed the lame man, Peter necessarily implies that He is very much

criminality of the Jews: they not only killed an innocent Man, but they killed a genuine *Servant of God* (3:14-15). Even worse, they killed “the Holy and Righteous One”—not *a* holy one, but *the* Holy One—a direct allusion to a Divine Being (Isaiah 43:15, Psalm 16:10, and John 6:69). The major points of the first part of Peter’s message (3:12-18) include:

- ❑ This (lame) man was healed with supernatural power. No one is denying this or can deny it.
- ❑ This power came from Jesus, who, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a servant of God. Yet, Jesus has already shown supremacy over any of these men, including His pre-existence of them (John 8:56-58).
- ❑ Jesus Christ is the One for whose death the Jewish *leaders* collaborated and to which the *people* consented.
- ❑ He is God’s Holy One—but the Jews treated Him with dishonor and contempt, just as Jesus had accused them of earlier (John 8:49).
- ❑ He is the Prince [lit., Author] of life—but the Jews traded His life for a murderer (Barabbas) instead (Mark 15:7-15).
- ❑ God raised Him from the dead—because God’s divine will *cannot be altered* by human intervention, and divine life is more powerful than death itself (implied).
- ❑ (Reprise:) The power these people have witnessed is from this Jesus, who has legitimate authority to perform such extraordinary miracles.

The use of “servant” (in 3:13) naturally recalls to the Jewish mind the so-called “Servant songs” of Isaiah 40 – 66, in which it is prophesied that the Servant of God will be highly exalted as a Great Redeemer of Israel (see Isaiah 42:1-4 and 52:13-15, for example). “[A]nd the faith which {comes} through Him...” (3:16)—i.e., Peter and John’s connection to this miracle is through their faith *in* Jesus Christ. The miracle could not have been performed otherwise. Thus, it is not the lame man’s faith that led to his healing, but the apostles’ faith in Christ.¹⁰

Another invitation for salvation (3:17-26)

“I know that you acted in ignorance...” (3:17)—this is not a concession, nor an exoneration of the crime; it is simply a statement of fact (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-8). Christ suffered in accordance with the prophecies concerning Him, yet this does not absolve the guilt of those who *made* Him suffer. The Law of Moses did not excuse an Israelite’s ignorance of that Law when it was clear that he should have known better (see Leviticus 5:17-19). Even the heathen’s ignorance of God was “without excuse” since he had sufficient evidence in the physical world to know of His existence and power (Romans 1:18-20). Calvin rightly notes, “Peter was saying that they acted through blind zeal rather than deliberate wickedness.”¹¹ Yet Boles clarifies,

alive and able to exert this power. If God is *presently* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—meaning, these men are still alive *to* God (Matthew 22:31-32)—then Jesus is also alive to God and no longer dead.

¹⁰ We should add here: this formerly-lame man was indeed healed of his lameness, but in order for his *sins* to be forgiven, he will have to do whatever any other person who hears and believes in the gospel of Christ must do: he must believe that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Savior; he must repent of his sins; he must be baptized into Christ; and he must live thereafter as the Lord’s disciple. We must not assume that people are made Christians simply because they are the recipients of miraculous action. Personal obedience to Christ is not negated or rendered unnecessary in *any* case, including those cases involving miracles. This point bears also upon the situation with Cornelius and company in chapter 10.

¹¹ Calvin, *Acts*, 55.

“Their ignorance did not justify their crime, nor excuse them; but it was grounds for calling on them to repent.”¹² In fact, there is never a need to speak of repentance except in the case of actual guilt. In the present case, such guilt will not be resolved until those responsible for His execution respond properly to the terms and conditions of God’s salvation.

Peter gives an abbreviated course of action (“repent and return”—3:19), but the full instruction cannot be different than what he had earlier stated through the inspiration of the Spirit (recall 2:38). In other words, such conversion cannot exclude calling on His name, baptism, or any other demonstration of faith and piety that is required for forgiveness of sins.¹³ Their “return” is not to the Law, nor to God’s covenant with Israel that served as the basis for that Law, but to God Himself (Luke 1:16). The only way *now* to “return” (or, be reconciled) to God is through obedience to His Son (John 14:6). “Wiped away” (3:21) is synonymous for forgiveness of sins, as in Acts 2:38. “The expression ‘to wipe away’ (or, ‘to blot out’) is taken from the practice of creditors charging their debtors, and when the debt is paid, the record is cancelled or blotted out, removed from the record. The word used here refers to the practice of writing such records on tablets covered with wax, and then by inverting the stylus, or instrument of writing, smoothing the wax again with the blunt end, thus removing every trace of the writing.”¹⁴ This calls to mind the promise God makes to those who call upon Him: “I will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12). The phrases, “times of refreshing” from the Lord, and “that He may send Jesus, the Christ [Messiah] appointed for you” (3:19b-20) refer to being at peace with God after having been reconciled to Him through His Son. God will not *literally* send Jesus to anyone, for He has already done this for the entire world (John 3:16), but His Son does become an Advocate to those who seek His intercession between them and the Father (1 John 2:1-2). The sending of Jesus in this manner necessitates forgiveness of sins, and vice versa.

The implications of 3:20-21 may be easily misunderstood. Jesus said that He would come again (Matthew 24:29-31), but *that* coming is in the context of judgment against Israel (in AD 70) for unfaithfulness toward its covenant with God. In the context of Peter’s message, however, the “sending” of Jesus indicates the personal intercession of Christ, not a national “coming” (in judgment) and certainly not the end of the world (as some have assumed). Thus, the coming of “the Christ [Messiah] appointed for you” is a blessed event *for those who believe in Him*, accompanied with “times of refreshing” from the bondage of sin and their condemnation from God. Specifically, this coming of the Messiah is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that linked Him with the spiritual—not physical—restoration of Israel (compare Ezekiel 37:15-28 and Matthew 19:27-30, for example). This restoration is fulfilled in the establishment of Christ’s church, the spiritual “Israel of God” (cf. Galatians 6:16) and the “heavenly Jerusalem” (cf. Hebrews 12:22).¹⁵

¹² Boles, *A Commentary on Acts*, 58.

¹³ This logic works both ways: in cases where only *believing* and *baptism* are mentioned (such as in Acts 8:12-13), this cannot exclude the need for *repentance* and *sincerity*. The only legitimate and responsible way to determine what must be done to become a Christian is to examine *all* the passages having to do with this process rather than just those verses that conform to one’s preferred conclusion. There is no single passage in the NT that tells *everything* required of a person in order to become Christian.

¹⁴ Reese, *Book of Acts*, 165.

¹⁵ Bruce (and others) thinks that this “restoration” is eschatological in nature, that is, it has to do with the end of time. Thus, he says that this requires a “renovation of all nature,” meaning (I think) a complete restoration of the physical earth to an Eden-like condition (*The Book of the Acts*, 91, fn 36). This forces us to believe that there

Moses predicted that a greater prophet than himself would arise from amongst the Israelites. He also warned that the failure to “give heed” to Him would warrant a divine curse (3:22-23; see Deuteronomy 18:15, 19).¹⁶ Unless these Jews repent of their sins—and especially the proud defiance and wicked intentions that led to their having crucified their Messiah—God will destroy them. The Old Testament prophets’ warnings of this kind of destruction (which came against unfaithful Israel and Judah) ought to be sufficient to convince them of what is coming.

The Jews virtually worshiped both Moses and his Law, yet Peter declares here that everything Moses wrote has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (3:24; see John 5:43-47). The “covenant” Peter mentions (3:25) is actually that which God made with Abraham, *not* with Israel. The Jews had failed to keep *their* covenant with God, but Abraham was faithful to *his*.¹⁷ God Himself was (is) still faithful to Abraham, since everyone who comes to Christ becomes a recipient of blessings promised through that covenant. God sent Christ to the Jews for this reason, to fulfill this ancient promise; however, the Jews (and everyone thereafter) must respond properly to Him (Christ) in order to inherit such blessings (Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29). “Sons of the prophets” is an honorable designation, but only if such “sons” demonstrate faithfulness to the Father as the prophets did. “Families” does not mean that God is saving whole families at a time, but that *no* “family”—i.e., national or ethnic group of people—will be denied the opportunity to enter into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. (“Family” in this context is used in the same way “house” is used in 2:36, as a distinct, identifiable group of many people, not a singular household.)

“For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (3:26)—“for you [Jews] *first*,” but not *only* you (as in Romans 1:16). The fact that “all the families...shall be blessed” (cited from Genesis 12:3) indicates that this covenant of salvation through Christ will not be limited to the Jews but will be open to all men in due time. But the actual entrance into the kingdom is conditioned upon repentance, just as Jesus foretold (Luke 24:44-47). No one can enjoy fellowship with God who refuses to abandon his

will *be* a physical restoration of the earth, or that this will even be necessary. Furthermore, this kind of far-reaching conclusion simply cannot be supported by Peter’s words, nor can it have any connection to the points that he is making to the Jews.

¹⁶ The phrase “God will raise up for you a prophet” (in Deuteronomy 18:15) certainly has a double meaning. Not only did God *appoint* this new “prophet,” but the prophecy itself conspicuously anticipates the fact that God *literally* raised (up) Jesus from the dead. While Moses died and was buried, and “no one knows his burial place to this day” (Deuteronomy 34:6), Jesus was *raised* from His burial place and we know *exactly* where He is today (recall 2:33). Thus, Moses was a *servant* of God, but Jesus is the *Son* of God (see Hebrews 3:1-6); Moses deferred to Jesus’ authority, yet Jesus never deferred to Moses’ authority except to say that “...he wrote of Me” (John 5:46); and Moses is dead, but Jesus is very much alive. By all accounts, Jesus is clearly the Prophet of whom Moses spoke; Peter only confirms for us what we already know by connecting the dots in Scripture. Despite this, many of the Jews did not listen to God’s appointed Prophet—the risen Jesus—which is exactly what Jesus Himself predicted (in essence) in Luke 16:31.

¹⁷ Moses told the Israelites that, while God’s covenant with Israel was in response to Abraham’s covenant, they were actually two different covenants (see Deuteronomy 5:1-3). Even so, Christ fulfilled *both* covenants: He is the “seed” promised to Abraham (compare Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:16); and He has satisfied everything required by the law *of* the Israelite covenant (the Law of Moses).

“wicked ways.” “Christ does not do away with the sins of the faithful so that they are free to sin; he makes them new people.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Calvin, *Acts*, 59.