

“Jumping for Joy”

Lesson Text: Acts 3:1–11 **Background Scripture:** Acts 3 **Devotional Reading:** Luke 10:1-9

Acts 3:1-11 (NIV)

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. ¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

Learning Facts: To describe the life of the man who was lame.

Biblical Principle: To know the name of the Lord Jesus has *all authority* behind it.

Daily Application: To write a prayer for discernment to recognize when to offer Jesus before offering material help.

INTRODUCTION

Uncompassionate Attitude

A few years ago, I helped lead a team of students on a missions week to a remote country. One of our team members was in a wheelchair, and the destination country’s main airport was an obstacle for this teammate. As we went through the airport on our way home, our group was expected to get to the boarding area by using a narrow escalator, something our team member could not do.

We eventually found an elevator. But when we arrived at the gate level, we encountered a corridor blocked by a locked door. We eventually found someone who had a key to this door, but we were left with the impression that this airport employee believed that people in wheelchairs should not be traveling.

Followers of Christ agree that we should show respect and compassion to our neighbors who have a physical or mental disability, or both. However, this was not necessarily the outlook in Jesus’ day. Many believed that suffering was God’s punishment for sin (see Luke 13:1–5; John 9:2), and those people with disabilities were treated accordingly.

LESSON CONTEXT

Acts 2:42–47 summarizes the ongoing activities of the just-birtherd church in Jerusalem, which included miraculous displays after the Day of Pentecost. Those ongoing displays are described as being “many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Hebrews 2:4 confirms God to be the one who authenticated the truth of the gospel preaching by “signs, wonders and various miracles.” Although miraculous healings obviously brought compassionate relief to the afflicted, their primary purpose was to validate the truth of Christianity in general and the person and work of Jesus in particular (see John 20:30–31). Today’s lesson forms part of that

larger tapestry.

We are not told exactly how long the events of today's lesson occurred after the Day of Pentecost, but it was probably several weeks later. The church had been busy, including a ministry of the selling of property to provide funds for relief of the poor (Acts 2:45). The apostles were still in Jerusalem, not having returned home to Galilee. They and the other followers of Jesus met daily in the spacious porticoes of the temple (2:46a). Activities included meeting in homes for breaking bread—fellowship meals that included celebration of the Lord's Supper (2:46b).

The Setting: Acts 3:1–2

We are presented with a daily custom of *prayer* that occurred at a specific time of day. We should remember that all the believers at this point were of Jewish background—there were no Gentile Christians until the events of Acts 10. Belief in Jesus and his resurrection did not cause *Peter and John* to abandon all Jewish practices; the same was true later for the apostle Paul (Acts 21:26; etc.).

Prayer had been important before, and it still was. Three traditional times for prayer at the temple were recognized: early morning when the priests made the daily sacrifice, in midafternoon, and at sunset (Exodus 29:38–39; Psalm 55:17). This is the second of those, *at three in the afternoon* (see also Acts 10:3, 30).

The fact that Peter and John went *up to the temple* indicates that its location in Jerusalem was at a higher elevation than the house where they were staying. These two apostles are mentioned together in the same verse a total of eight times in the book of Acts. Four of those times are in today's text; the other four are in Acts 1:13; 4:13, 19; and 8:14. So we see the strong bond of love between these early believers.

As Peter and John entered the temple, there was a man who had been lame from birth, and now “about forty years old” (Acts 4:22). People suffering from disabilities were a common sight in the ancient world (compare Matthew 15:30), and no less so in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12–16; etc.). For someone to have been lame from birth indicates a congenital condition rather than a tragic accident (compare John 9:1, 32; Acts 14:8). The legs of this certain man had never been able to support his weight and allow him to walk.

Although his physical condition was terrible, he did have two things going for him. First, he had family members or friends who were willing carry him to the temple *every day*. Second, he had a prime, high-traffic place that seems to be recognized as his right. This particular *gate called Beautiful* (again at Acts 3:10, below) is usually understood to have been on the eastern side of the temple. (Some see it as having been the eastern gate for the inner courtyard.)

1. Who did John and Peter meet on their way to the temple to pray? (Acts 3:1-2)

What Do You Think?

What adjustments can your congregation make to ensure that people with disabilities can easily participate in worship in your meeting place?

Digging Deeper

Who should be recruited to help with appropriate follow through?

The Expectations: Acts 3:3–6

When the man saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. The two hear the beggar's request. Since the believers had pooled their resources (Acts 2:44-45), the two apostles had no money to give; but money was not what the man needed most. However, Peter and John did have something to offer the man. As both Peter and John looked straight at the man, *then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention,*

expecting to get something from them. Verse 3 here indicates that the beggar had already seen the two apostles when Peter said, Look at us. Therefore the request by Peter wasn't for the man to do something entirely different but for him to do something more intensely. That extra intensity undoubtedly resulted in making eye contact. In any case, the two apostles gained the full attention of the man. Peter, no longer the wishy-washy denier from Jesus' trials, spoke to the man with confidence.

2. What did the man do when he saw Peter and John about to enter? (Acts 3:3-5)

What Do You Think?

How can you practice being more attentive to people you might be tempted to ignore?

Digging Deeper

What kinds of people, if any, should believers not associate with? What Scriptures support your answer?

Side Note: *Thus far from the first three verses we see that Peter and John were not so caught up with large crowds that they had no time for individuals. Nor were they so busy in ministry that they could not pray. They had learned their lessons well from the Lord Jesus (See Mark 1:35; Luke 8:40-42).*

The apostle then offered the lame and much more than silver and gold. Peter's classic response was, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

The emphasis in chapters 3-4 is on the name of Jesus (3:6, 13, 16, 20, 26; 4:2, 7, 10, 12, 17-18) the name above every name (Philippians 2:9-11). Faith in the name of Jesus releases power so that lives are changed! To pray or minister in His name means to ask or act on His authority (Matthew 28:18-20) so that He alone gets the glory.

3. What did Peter offer the man? (Acts 3:6)

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Peter's response set a precedent for believers? In what ways does it not?

Digging Deeper

How can you practice meeting a person's physical needs while also not ignoring his or her spiritual needs?

The Wonder: Acts 3:7-11

When Peter took the man's hand, immediately the *feet and ankles* of the lame man *became strong* which was not their own. The man jumped to his feet, walked and accompanied the two disciples into the temple leaping and praising God!

Remember, this man had been disabled from birth. Thus his disability was not from disease or injury. He was not being "healed" or "restored," technically speaking, since he was being made whole for the first time in his life.

Furthermore, there is more here than having made this man's feet and ankles whole. He also learned to walk and jump instantly. Toddlers take months to learn to walk well and even longer to learn to hop about. Adults who have suffered traumatic injuries to the spine or legs can testify to the challenge of learning how to walk again. With this man on that day at the temple, the psychomotor controls in his brain instantly knew how to make his legs work. Not only could he walk; he could jump, which is an advanced stage of using legs and ankles. Leaping was not "stage two" for him; rather, it was the first thing he did!

4. What did Peter do to the man next? (Acts 3:7-8)

What Do You Think?

How can you give praise to God through expressions of worship that are different from your normal expressions?

Digging Deeper

How will you use your unique skills and talents to praise God in this regard?

Those standing by looked on in *amazement* when they *saw him walking and praising God*. Obviously they recognized the man as the lame beggar who had been a familiar sight at the Gate Beautiful. Here a crowd of spectators thronged around the man and the disciples. They stood in *wonder* and were ready for some explanation.

5. What was everyone's reaction to his healing? (Acts 3:9-10)

What Do You Think?

How can believers be attentive to the wonder and amazement of God's miraculous work in the world?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to someone who may attribute miraculous occurrences to something or someone other than God (example: Acts 14:8–15)?

The healing of the lame beggar drew a crowd around the three men which then congregated in an area of the temple known as Solomon's Porch. This was a covered open-air area on the east side of the temple, a corridor where our Lord had ministered (John 10:23) and where the church worshiped (Acts 5:12).

Peter saw that the crowd's amazement turned to him and John and immediately Peter identified the source of the miracle—Jesus Christ, the Son of God (not in today's lesson). Wisely, Peter said that this was the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This man was healed wholly by the grace of God. He gave evidence of what God had done by "walking, and jumping, and praising God" (Acts 3:8) and by publicly identifying himself with the apostles, both in the temple (Acts 3:11) and in their arrest (Acts 4:3, 14). Now that he could stand, there was no question where this man stood!

6. What happened when the people came running up to the three (Acts 3:11)?

CONCLUSION

The Ultimate Goal

Over half of Jesus' miracles recorded in the Gospels involved people who were sick, blind, mute, deaf, or otherwise suffering a physical disability. This does not count summary statements where we are told Jesus "healed many" (see Mark 1:34). He cared deeply about those with physical disabilities. A word used several times to describe Jesus' attitude and actions in this regard is "compassion" (see Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 8:2).

Compassion is also seen in the first-century church's acceptance of responsibility to care for those among them who were unable to care for themselves fully (Acts 2:45; 4:32–35; 6:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8–9; etc.). The ministries extended to those whose disabilities caused them to be marginalized or ignored by others. The church of today continues to recognize and respond to such a challenge. It does so in a variety of ways; examples are the establishment of hospitals, the design of buildings that have no physical barriers restricting access, and distribution of food via pantries.

Peter and John's care for the man in today's text gained the attention of others who were then eager to hear Peter's gospel message. We must conclude that was the ultimate intended result, the most important part, not the healing in and of itself. Physical disabilities last only for this life; spiritual disabilities are eternal. A church's care for those who have physical challenges should make the church attractive to unbelievers who become open to hearing the gospel and can thereby gain eternal life.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to anticipate great results as we minister to those who have unique needs. As we do, remind us that our compassion is not an end in and of itself. Rather, we make our obedience to Jesus complete by sharing the gospel, which leads to the eternal life that is available only through Jesus. We pray in His mighty name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Offer spiritual healing as you meet physical needs.