

Acts 3 - John Karmelich

To begin, let me open with something most of us can relate to: Dealing with the moment our mentor is not around and in our heads we hear them saying, "OK kid, time for you to do like I did!" I suspect all of us can all relate to moments like that! Now imagine being one of Jesus' disciples. Picture one of the disciples seeing a blind person and saying, "Hang on for a second, let me go get my buddy Jesus so we can end that problem once and for all!" What would they do after Jesus left? It's one thing to say that's He's the Savior of the world, but it must have been impossible for them to think "I'll perform a miracle to prove it!" Even in the last chapter, after the whole "tongues" thing, I'm sure they thought, that whole thing will help us preach Jesus more effectively but only God can do the things we saw Jesus do! Yet here in this chapter, we're see the first miracle the disciples did without Jesus in their midst!

OK John hold your horses! Most of us can accept the idea of one of Jesus disciples doing a miracle or even them preaching Jesus to a crowd. What does any of that have to do with you and me? One thing that always fascinated me in the Gospels is Jesus said we would do greater miracles than He did. (See John 14:12.) Yes I talked about it last week. Still this is the first time the disciples "soloed" and that is worth considering as we use our lives to make a difference for Him. As I said in the last lesson, we get the privilege of leading people to eternal life and leading people closer to Him. My point is as we read of Peter in this chapter ("soloing" in effect) for Jesus what I want each of us to consider is that we also are "flying solo" with the Holy Spirit guidance of course!

Obviously God doesn't give us vivid miracles like Peter got here. What we forget is that each of us is a living miracle and will live forever. All we have to do is preach what we know and trust God to do the things we can't do! None of us know our bible perfectly. I don't think that's the issue. What He wants is for each of us to be a living witness for Him. Sometimes that involves preaching His truth but what's the main thing is living our lives as a witness for Him no matter what's going on at the moment.

With that said, let me give some of the chapter highlights and then I'll come back to this topic. It opens with the disciples going to the temple at 3pm for daily prayer. Remember Jesus told them to hang tight in Jerusalem. Chapter 2 ended with 3,000 disciples. There was no place for them to gather as they did not have buildings yet! Anyway, they went to the temple. By the entrance was a man born crippled. I don't know if Peter just thought, "Hey I saw Jesus do this a million times, let me give it a try" or if that was when Holy Spirit "poked him". However it happened, Peter took a man who never walked and he was immediately walking and leaping as if it was no big deal. I admit it made me wonder about Adam (as in Adam and Eve). He must have just started walking and didn't have to learn it! My point is Peter and the disciples with him were used for a miracle without Jesus present.

OK so what? The purpose of miracles isn't to make people healthy. It's to be used as reasons to praise God for how He works in the world. Bottom line is Peter used the miracle to preach to the people who were gathered in the temple area as again, it was the time of prayer. Therefore Peter had a crowd there and obviously had the proof of God doing a miracle standing right in front of him.

Peter then preached "Guilt and grace". Remember we can't accept God's grace until we first realize we need His forgiveness for our sins. Preaching "guilt" is just a short way of saying God exists and we are going to be judged by Him as we're all guilty of sin. In other words we must grasp the problem before we can hear the solution: That we're sinners and need to accept His grace as the only remedy. He does the convicting and He leads people to accept His grace. He chooses to work through people (you and me) to preach that "Guilt and grace".

By the way "Preaching Guilt and grace" is my lesson title, as that describes this chapter well. Realize by the end of the chapter the church in Jerusalem grew from 3,000 to about 10,000. My point is what Peter preached works. For church growth, we don't need fancy programs, we just need to preach guilt and grace and let God do the work from there!

With that said, let me summarize the chapter. In the opening few verses, Peter and the disciples do the first recorded miracle "without Jesus". A man born lame suddenly walks and started leaping. There is no testing of the legs or learning how to walk. His muscles just started working like a normal person. That leads to the issue of what do we do with this man?

As the disciples had this crowd with them (again 3,000 believers at this point), I don't know how many were joining them. The temple at that time had a large open patio area. It was the hour of prayer, so it was a large group going there. Also keep in mind the Pentecost holiday of Chapter 2 is over, so we got the "regulars" there at this point. Apparently the former beggar was well known and he was putting on a big show as he was testing his legs. Peter as the spokesman of the 12 now filled with the Holy Spirit that was given in Chapter 2, "takes over" and gives a speech to the large patio area filled with people.

Keep in mind this is very "Jewish" at this point. The Jewish people who lived there were all aware that Jesus was crucified about two months earlier. Luke tells us that over 500 people saw Jesus alive after it was over. So picture Peter telling the religious crowd in effect, "Remember the guy that was crucified not too long ago, the one we claim is the Messiah? He's resurrected and you're all in big trouble since you rejected Him and crucified Him!" Remember Jewish people already believed that they'll be judged by God and now it's sinking in that they killed the Messiah! With the former beggar being part of that group, there wasn't much they could do to argue against them!

One has to give Peter a little credit here as he switches from "Guilt to grace". The rest of the sermon is on the subject of, "It's not too late!" He preaches that each of one of them could repent, accept Jesus as the Messiah, and they'd be forgiven and still go to heaven. Let's just say by the end of Chapter 3, there were 10,000 men (figure over 20,000 with women and children) that are now part of the church! Every source of water in the area must have been used for baptism!

OK John this is interesting ancient history. Why should we care? If we walk past say a blind person or someone with a deformity of some sort, we may say, "You are cured" but let's be honest, it's strictly up to God to decide when miracles are to be done and when. What God calls us to do is to preach both of guilt and grace. I'm not saying we all have to be preachers. I'm saying each of us is called to be a part of the great commission, to preach Jesus over the world. Again we must explain why people need to be saved before we can explain Jesus. The related point is not to be obnoxious about it! If the opportunity arises, we're simply to do what God calls us to do. It's strictly His job to save people. Our job is to be a witness for Him. That's the lesson of Chapter 3 of the book of Acts.

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