

Jumping for Joy

Acts 3:1-26

Introduction

In recent weeks, as you drive around town, you may have noticed at certain major intersections, someone standing and holding a sign that says something like, “Will work for food,” or “Homeless, need food.” If you are like me, you sit there with mixed feelings of pity and skepticism. You wonder if they are for real, or if begging at that intersection is their work.

As a college student in a small town, I was approached by a homeless man while walking through the downtown area one afternoon. His clothing was old and his breath had the telltale smell of alcohol. He asked me for a dollar. As a college student, to even have a dollar in my pocket would have been a minor miracle! I told him, “Listen, I’ve got something better for you than money.”

He seemed interested, so I proceeded by sharing with him a clear presentation of the gospel. He followed every word and asked a few questions. After twenty minutes or so, I asked him if he would like to turn from his sin and accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. With tears in his eyes he said, “Yes.”

I thought I would make it hard for him, so I asked him if he would kneel with me there on the sidewalk to pray. To my surprise he said, “Yes, I will.”

In broad daylight, with people walking around us, we knelt and I led him in a prayer to receive Christ. What a moment! I could hardly wait to get back to the dorm and tell the incredible story of this man’s conversion to Christ. After we prayed, we stood back up and he said, “Now, about that dollar . . . can you give me some money?”

I said, “You know, I don’t even have any money, but there is a Mission nearby that will help you get back on your feet and begin a new life.”

He said, “You mean you’re not going to give me any money?”

I said, “No, I don’t have any.”

To my utter amazement, he cursed at me, turned on his heel, and stomped away. He stopped only to turn again and shout obscenities and other unrepeatable sayings my way.

I was shattered. The whole thing had been a scam. The man was a conversion con artist. There was no telling how many other times he had been “saved”.

This morning, I want to turn your attention to the conversion of a beggar. This time, however, it is not a trick or a scam, it is for real. It is the story of a man in desperate need – and he is about to receive something far different than what he was asking.

The Miracle Healing Ministry of Peter and John

The beggar’s story begins in chapter 3 of the book of Acts and weaves its way through the middle of chapter 4. In fact, it will be on the heels of this beggar’s conversion that the persecution of the early church leaders will begin.

The beggar’s physical ailment

We will first look at the beggar’s physical ailment. Notice verses 1 and 2 of Acts, chapter 3.

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.

In just one verse, verse 2, we discover several things about this lame beggar.

First of all, notice that Luke tells us that this beggar was lame from his mother's womb. In other words, he was born lame. This was not the result of an accident, he was born lame.

If you skip down to verse 7, Luke the doctor, actually gives us medical insight through the use of a medical term. He says,

And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

The word "strengthened" literally means "socketed". Hypocrites used the same word to describe a condition of paralysis in the feet and ankles.

Now, the fact that this man was miraculously healed has created movements and ministries throughout the last century that promise physical healing as part of God's will for the faithful. And, there are a slew of men who parade about as conduits of this special healing power.

So, I want to stop at this point, and provide a biblical answer. This is not only for those who are listening today, but through us as well, to many people in that movement who will eventually become disheartened and disillusioned simply because we all get sick and we will all eventually die. And no one, outside of accidents, has ever died without poor health having something to do with it.

Cautions Concerning Contemporary Miracle Healers

Let me give several cautions concerning contemporary miracle healers.

The miraculous gift of healing was demonstrated through the apostles only

- One caution is the realization that the miraculous gift of healing was demonstrated through the apostles only.

In II Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 12, Paul says, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*

Just as an Old Testament prophet was authenticated through miracles of prophecy, strength, and fire from heaven, so the New Testament era opened with apostles who were authenticated by their Christ-delegated power to heal.

No one who saw Elijah go to heaven in a fiery chariot should have said, "Hey, I ought to be able to go to heaven like that too, or God isn't fair."

No one who saw Moses' face brightly glowing from having been in the presence of God's glory should have gone to the mirror and said, "Why can't my face shine like that too?"

The truth is, the early New Testament church body neither experienced things the apostles experienced nor performed miracles the apostles performed.

Look at Acts, chapter 2, verse 43.

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

John MacArthur makes an important distinction when he writes,

Contrary to the teaching of many today, the early church was not a miracle working church. Rather, they were a church with miracle working apostles. The gift of healing in the early church was limited to the apostles and their close associates in ministry.

As the church, described in Acts, developed, the miracle ministry of the apostles diminished

- A second caution is that as the church, described in Acts, developed, the miracle ministry of the apostles diminished.

A point only needs to be proven so often. Eventually the apostles were renowned for their miraculous power, so the display of power to prove that their mission was indeed from God became less and less important.

That explains why Paul did not heal Trophimus, but actually left him sick at Miletus, as he tells us in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 20b. Epaphroditus nearly died while working with Paul, according to

Philippians, chapter 2, verse 27. And, isn't it strange that Timothy would suffer from some digestive or intestinal disorder? He had abstained from drinking anything but straight water due to his concern over his integrity and ministry. Paul had to tell him to drink a little wine for the sake of his stomach, in I Timothy, chapter 5, verse 23. We might ask, "C'mon Paul, why not just heal him?"

As the record of scripture continues forward, the healing ministry of the apostles ceases.

The illustrations of miracles in the book of Acts were not primarily to heal the afflicted, but to authenticate the apostle and his message

- Another caution is that the illustrations of miracles in Acts were not primarily to heal the afflicted, but to authenticate the apostle and his message.

Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, make it very clear that the signs of confirmation were wonders and miracles that were performed through the apostles as they established the new dispensation of the church. Since that miraculous era of confirmation, we have been building on the foundation of the apostles.

Mark, chapter 16, verses 19 and 20, tell us that after the Lord ascended, the apostles went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

In Romans, chapter 15, verses 18 and 19, Paul records that he preached the gospel as the apostle to the Gentiles with signs and wonders.

The apostles were a part of a miracle age of confirming God's power through this new community called church, and a new dispensation called grace, and a new theology called the New Testament.

If the apostles healed people just because they were sick, they would have been incredibly cruel men. Peter and John should have healed every disabled person in Jerusalem; every sick person; every dying man and woman, but they did not!

Why not? Because there was a divine purpose behind each display of power – it proved their apostolic commission from God.

You might say, "Stephen, why take the time to expound on this issue? Are you afraid of the miraculous?"

No. But I am afraid for you, and I want to warn you, just as Paul exhorted the elders in Ephesus to watch out for their flock, according to Acts, chapter 20, because false teachers and deceivers would come in and take advantage of them in the name of Christ.

Let me give a couple of principles.

The ability of Satan to counterfeit miracles of healing requires critical thinking among Christians today

- The ability of Satan to counterfeit miracles of healing requires critical thinking among Christians today.

Did you know that Satan and his demonic hosts can produce counterfeit healings and miracles? They not only accomplish it under the name of false religions, but in America, much of it is done under the guise of Christianity.

The Lord Himself warned, in Mark, chapter 13, verse 22,

for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

The apostle Paul warns, in II Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, that,

. . . that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth . . . the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders

If you have ever wondered how the population of planet earth could unite to actually follow him, Paul tells us in Mark, chapter 13, verses 3 and 4,

. . . the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Now, does this mean that God does not perform miracles of healing today? Does this mean that we cannot pray for healing for those in our body? Oh no!

While God's plan today may include miracle healings, miracle healers are no longer part of His plan

- The second principle is, while God’s plan today may include miracle healing, miracle healers are no longer part of His plan.

God may choose to heal and He may choose not to. He ultimately works according to His plan for our lives.

I want you to listen to, what I would call, a miracle healing. There is no prayer of faith for this healing and there is no one even praying over this man who is healed. He does not expect the healing and is, in fact, in the process of preaching that God does not guarantee healing for His children; that God alone has the sovereign right over life and health.

Pastor Miller was afflicted by a virus that invaded his voice box. The virus irreparably damaged his voice so that he was unable to speak above a hoarse whisper. He lost his ability to pastor, resigned from his church, and spent three years out of the ministry. His church auditorium class invited him to speak to them, but he refused. They insisted, saying they would put a lapel microphone right under his mouth so that he could be amplified and heard. He agreed, and in the process of explaining, correctly, that Christians do not have a right to physical health, God sovereignly chooses to bring glory to himself.

Focus on The Family has given us permission to listen to this portion of their broadcast. Listen to what happens in this auditorium Sunday school class where this man had once faithfully preached the Word of God.

. . . To say that every single person will always be healed because Jesus died on the cross is a misinterpretation of scripture – not true; won’t work. Isaiah, chapter 53, doesn’t talk about physical healing – I’m sorry, that’s just not the context. And to impress that there, causes a misinterpretation of scripture – that’s wrong. On the other hand, to say that since we don’t have anything after the book of Acts; that miracles ended in the book of Acts and they never happen again is equally as wrong. Because you have put God in a box both ways – and He doesn’t want to be in the box. So, the Psalmist says, “I am excited, bless the Lord, o my soul, one of His benefits is He heals all of my diseases.” And in verse 4 says, “And He redeems my life from the pit.” [Pastor Miller’s voice suddenly starts to return on the word “pit”]. . . Now I like that verse a whole lot. I have

had and you have had in times past, pit experiences. . . . [Pastor Miller’s hesitates as his voice begins to fully return] . . . We’ve all had times when our lives seemed to be in a pit; in a grave . . . and we didn’t have an answer for the pit we find ourselves in. . . . [Pastor Miller in tears, but in a normal voice] . . . I don’t understand this right now. I’m overwhelmed at the moment. I’m not quite sure what to say or do. . . . It sounds funny to say, I’m at a loss for words. . . .

Incredible! Wonderful! Irrefutable! Undeniable! He was not asking for it; he had not mustered up the faith for it – God just did it. And, it brought glory to no one else but God.

The Beggar’s Pitiabale Request

Now, let us go back to the story in Acts, chapter 3. There is one more thing I want you to know from verse 2. We read that the beggar was,

. . . set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, informs us that this particular temple gate was impressive. It was made of Corinthian bronze and then overlaid with gold and silver. The gate was so heavy that it took twenty men to close it. They have written that when the sunlight shone on this gate, it shone with spectacular beauty.

It is ironic, isn’t it, that something so impressive and beautiful would be the daily post of someone so dirty, pathetic, and hopeless?

That beautiful gate led from the court of the Gentiles into the court of the women. I think this fellow was smart. Perhaps he figured that he would evoke more pity from women than men.

I think it is significant as well, that of all the places he could have begged in the city of Jerusalem, he chose the temple. He was hoping that in the mercy of those who had money to give to God, they could surely give some to him.

Growing up around the servicemen’s center in downtown Norfolk, Virginia, allowed us missionary kids the opportunity to explore every nook and cranny of that small downtown area. While the streets were not necessarily any cleaner back then, they were certainly a lot safer. I will never forget an old beggar

who was always sitting at the same spot – on the sidewalk at the bottom of the steps of a large department store. He had stumps for legs and was always seated on a large board with wheels, upon which he got around. He always smiled at people. There were times when I put all I had into his stainless steel cup – which was probably some nickels and dimes. He would respond with a toothy grin and a big, “Thank you, sir.”

He was totally dependant upon the pity of downtown shoppers and small kids like me, who were going in to the store with money to spend. Surely those who had money to spend could give him some.

So here sits this beggar, according to verse 2, crying out to those entering the temple, “Alms for a lame man. Alms for a poor beggar!”

The Beggar’s Personal Testimony

Now notice verses 3 through 10 of Acts, chapter 3.

When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.

But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!”

And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!”

And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

(Or, were “socketed”; were joined.)

With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising . . .

(. . . Peter?! No, praising . . .)

. . . God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God;

And they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Can you picture this scene? This lame man is walking and leaping! Not only does this miracle involve the creation of muscles and the joining of bones and tendons, and the regeneration of muscle memory in his brain, he is able to immediately walk! It takes a child two years to learn how to walk, and those of us who are parents wish it took much longer! It takes even longer to learn how to run and jump. He is doing it all – and in the temple.

Men with long faces are praying long prayers; people are moving about fulfilling their ritual duties, when suddenly, they see movement. This man’s head appears above everyone else’s. He is laughing and jumping up and down. He breaks out with a “Hallelujah!” or “Yeeehaa!” – an ancient Hebrew word – and people stared at him.

The shock wave spread throughout the temple, “Hey, this is the lame beggar. He hasn’t walked in forty years! It can’t be.”

Then with this man holding onto Peter’s arm, like a living illustration, Peter begins to preach. In the next few verses, he explains that this man is indeed an illustration of the power of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Peter explains that Christ has a kingdom that will one day come to earth. And, in that kingdom, guess what the prophets declared? Isaiah, chapter 35, verse 6a, tells us,

Then the lame will leap like a deer . . .

This man is an illustration of what it will be like in the kingdom. You will also be a part of it, if you receive now, the Lord Jesus Christ as your Messiah.

Imagine preaching about the promise, while the foretaste of that promise dances around you all the while!

Application

Let me give several applications from this beggar’s story.

Like the beggar’s condition, our situation is helplessly crippled; unable to walk spiritually

1. First, like the beggar’s condition, our situation is helplessly crippled; unable to walk spiritually.

The beggar was . . .	We are . . .
born physically lame.	born spiritually crippled.

poor; unable to survive without someone's help.	bankrupt; unable to live forever without the help of Christ.
outside the place of worship.	separated from God, no matter how near to the door.
totally healed by the grace of God.	brought to life by grace through faith in God alone.

Like the beggar's cure, our spiritual healing is available to those who will simply ask

2. Secondly, like the beggar's cure, our spiritual healing is available to those who will ask.

The cure really depends upon that which you beg. All of humanity in fact, is hungry and thirsty and in deep need. From which well will you try to drink for satisfaction? Will you drink from the wells of sensuality, business, materialism, power, popularity, or philanthropy? They will all leave you thirsting for another drink. Only Jesus Christ can truly satisfy.

Let me read a story by Chuck Swindoll entitled, *Come Before Winter*.

He was a routine admission to busy Bellevue Hospital. A charity case, one among hundreds. A bum from the New York slums with a slashed throat. The details of what had happened in the predawn of that chilly winter's morning were fuzzy. The nurse probably shrugged it off. She had seen thousands, and she was sure to see thousands more.

Would it have made any difference if she and those who treated him had known who he was? Probably so. His recent past was the antithesis of his earlier years. He had reached the dead-end street of an incredible life. But all that was over. He was one among many. Like all the rest, he now lived only to drink. His health was gone and he was starving.

On that icy January morning, before the sun had crept over New York's skyline, a shell of a man who looked twice his age, staggered to the wash basin and fell. The basin toppled and shattered. He was found lying in a heap, naked and bleeding from a deep gash in his throat. His forehead was badly bruised and

he was semiconscious. A doctor was called, no one special – remember, this was the Bowery. He used black sewing thread that somebody found to suture the wound. That would do. All the while, the bum begged for a drink. A buddy shared the bottom of a rum bottle to calm his nerves. He was dumped in a paddy wagon and dropped off at Bellevue Hospital, where he would languish, unable to eat for three days . . . and die. Still unknown.

When they scraped together his belongings, they found a ragged, dirty coat with thirty-eight cents in one pocket and a scrap of paper in the other. All his earthly goods. Enough coins for another drink and just five words that read, "Dear friends and gentle hearts." Almost like the words of a song, someone thought.

It was then that someone arrived who was able to identify him – and give the answer to why in the world a forgotten derelict would carry around a line of lyrics in his pocket. Maybe he still believed he had it in him. Maybe that derelict with the body of a bum, still had the heart of a genius. For once upon a time, long before his tragic death, he had written the songs that literally made the whole world sing. Songs like: "Camptown Races," "I Dream of Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair," "Oh Susanna," and two hundred more that had become deeply rooted in our rich American heritage. Thanks to Stephen Foster, who at the time of his death, nobody knew, and for whom nobody cared.

My friend, if you have not received the free gift of eternal life, offered to beggars who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it does not matter how successful, how dynamic, how wealthy you are. One day, if not on earth, in eternity, it will all take wings and fly away. And throughout the eons of everlasting judgment, you will be forgotten – your life wasted – just another casualty who took the broad road that leads to destruction.

However, as John, chapter 1, verse 12, tells us, ***But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God . . .***

Like the beggar's commitment, our response to God's free gift should be a public testimony

3. The third application is that like the beggar's commitment, our response to God's free gift should be a public testimony.

I love this! Notice chapter 4, verses 13 and 14 of Acts.

Now as they [the religious leaders] observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

The lame man might have still had on his street clothes, but the religious leaders recognized him! They had passed him on the steps day in and day out.

Some of them may have put some coins in his stainless steel cup. Now, here he stands! I would imagine that he is still jumping up and down. I can see him grinning from ear to ear as he stood there. He recognized them too! He might have said, "Hey, fellas! Can you believe this?! Isn't the Son of God good?"

And they could not reply.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Now that this man could stand, there was no question where this man stood."

May it be for all of us as well, who have been rescued from the hopeless slum of sin and placed under the care of our Great Physician and therefore, been guaranteed the well being of our souls for all eternity. May we stand for Him – our living Lord and Savior.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/17/1996 by Stephen Davey.

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