

Speak Boldly

I hope you all enjoyed last week's homework as much as I enjoyed writing it for you. I know it seemed like we covered a lot of material, and yet we are about to commence only the third chapter of Acts! Actually we will be covering more than just Acts 3; we will also go through chapter 4, so prepare yourself for some diggin' into the Word!

Our first passage this week will start with a bang – in just 10 brief verses we will be present for a beautiful miracle – and beautiful is a key word for our lesson. That miracle will then launch us into our second passage for the week, Peter's second speech at the temple. And just as our young church is beginning to form, we will see it come under attack by an old enemy. In our final passage the disciples will teach us what it means to pray boldly and effectively.

After last week's homework I'm hoping you are feeling engaged and ready to jump right into to this week's work, but I'm not surprised if you are also feeling a bit overwhelmed! I know I'm asking a lot of you all – a lot of time and effort. But I promise you, if you stick with it you will be richly blessed by the Holy Spirit for every moment you spend in God's Word. If you are feeling it is just too much, do what you can and just *read* everything. Don't worry about the questions, just read them and come to class ready for the Spirit to pour forth upon you! This is not to be a stressful endeavor; it is to be a *joyful* one. God bless you this week as you persevere in your studying!

A Beautiful Miracle

Dear One, our scripture passage today resounds with beauty. Maybe it is not the beauty of a sunset, a rose in bloom, or what the world tells us is beautiful in the physically attractive young person gracing the pages of a magazine. It is a different kind of beautiful. It is the revealing of the beautiful in the eyes of the Lord. *Heavenly Father, I pray over this daughter of yours that today she see with your eyes the beauty contained in your word. I pray for an outpouring of your grace and spirit as she prepares to enter into your word, and that she will be graced with your presence today. Amen.*



Read the Acts 3:1-10 and answer the following questions.

As Peter and John approached the Temple, who was being carried to the gate?

How long had he been crippled?

Why was the crippled man there?

What does Leviticus 21:17-20 tell us about those who have physical defects and what are the implications for this crippled man?

What did Peter do?

Describe the man's demeanor as he entered the temple (see v. 8).

Read Isaiah 35:1-10. How do verse 3 and 6 relate to our miracle in Acts?

Did the people in the temple recognize him? In what way was he identified by the people in the temple?

What was the response of those who saw the results of the miraculous healing of the crippled man?

Our scripture passage starts very simply: Peter and John were heading up to the temple at the time of prayer. As we learned last week, this is what they usually did, as did many Jewish men and women. They also gathered in the courts to learn from Rabbis and the apostles also went there to teach believers. As Peter and John approached the temple gate a man crippled from birth was being settled in his usual place to beg for alms. We know this to be his usual activity because the crowds in the court recognized him and identified him from his usual place at the gate (v. 10). This man was probably there every day of his life. As crowds of people passed through the temple gates multiple times throughout the day, he was in good place to beg for alms. Collecting alms was his only means of support. Crippled beggars led a harsh life of poverty and rejection. Because of his congenital defect he was deemed smited by God. His physical state was believed to be caused by either the sinful state of his parents or himself. He was unwelcome in society, and unwelcome within the temple gates. He could not enter the temple to make sacrifices, receive spiritual teaching, he did not receive blessings from the priests, and he was not allowed to participate in any way in religious aspects of Jewish society. He was considered unclean and forsaken by God.

Almsgiving was one of the three major tenets of spiritual piety. Along with prayer and ritual cleanliness, almsgiving was a charitable act to gain favor of God (and respect of men!). This crippled man sat by the gate everyday collecting the small pittance tossed his way. Notice that Peter has to tell the man to look at the two of them. I seriously doubt anyone ever stopped to speak with this man, let alone make eye contact. Crippled beggars were ranked barely above lepers in society. This dejected, rejected man was likely not used to anyone paying attention or speaking to him.

This man, expecting to receive a pittance from the Galilean speaking to him, was about to receive something beyond his wildest imaginations. At a word in the name of Jesus Christ, Peter raised him to his feet. His feet and ankles were whole and strong, immediately and completely healed. Have you ever injured yourself – twisted your ankle or injured your knee? While you aren't technically crippled, you hobble about, and feel completely unstable. Even as it heals over time, it is still weak, needs exercise to strengthen the muscles supporting your joint, or possibly even surgery or physical therapy to bring it back to a state of strength and normalcy. But even then, it is never quite what it had been. Well, imagine, at just one word uttered in the name of Christ that that injury was healed as if it

had never occurred. That is what happened to this man, but even more – he had never walked before! He was crippled from birth. This man had never walked, run or jumped in his life – and here he is leaping and running – and praising God. This man knew deep in his heart that it was God who healed him, it wasn't Peter. Peter performed the healing but it was God's power and authority by which it was done. And the man leapt for joy in the knowledge that he was not forsaken by God.

In fact this man's leaping and running is described in a special way. A very rare Greek word is used to describe his leaping. It is the word *hallomai*¹ that is also used in Isaiah 35:6 where it reads, "Then will the lame leap like a deer." Luke's use of this particular Greek word connects this miraculous healing with Isaiah's Messianic passage². By linking Isaiah's passage about the messianic restoration with this miracle, Luke is claiming again that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah 35:1-10, from which this verse comes, speaks to the joy of the redeemed when the Messiah comes and restores the people of Israel:

*they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.*

³ *Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;*

⁴ *say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;*

*your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;*

with divine retribution

he will come to save you."

⁵ *Then will the eyes of the blind be
opened*

and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

⁶ *Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.*

*Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.*

(Isaiah 35:2-6)

Not only would this crippled man be physically healed, he would receive something denied him his entire life – spiritual restoration. The man is made physically whole and now can enter into the temple and participate in worshipping God and presenting his sacrifices before the Lord. This healing, both physical and spiritual, is only made possible by the healing power of Jesus the Messiah, the one who came to restore Israel to the Lord. The man's soul is restored to a proper relationship with God, and beauty abounds. He is physically whole, he is spiritually at peace, and he is leaping and praising the Lord. What a beautiful sight! I can only imagine that God was touched by the beauty of the events unfolding at the gate called Beautiful that ordinary day.

Personal Reflection

Re-read verse 10. How does this miracle open the way for the Holy Spirit to act?

¹ NAC

² Luke in his study of the Old Testament would have used the Greek translation of the Torah called the Septuagint.

Peter's Second Speech

Our lesson yesterday sets us up for Peter's speech in the temple courtyard. The miracle outside the gate Beautiful will fulfill its purpose for those present in the temple courts. Miracles are never the end of the story; they serve to point us to God's salvation in the name of Jesus. We know from our study yesterday that it was in Jesus' name that the well-known cripple was healed. This miracle gathered a crowd of awestruck onlookers prepared to hear how this miracle came about. Our lesson today focuses on by whose power or authority this healing took place. Jesus' name means "Yahweh saves" or "Salvation is from Yahweh"³. By the end of Peter's speech the assembled crowd will have a whole new understanding of what kind of salvation is being offered. Before you start your homework today, take a few minutes to prepare yourself to hear the Lord's message.



Read Acts 3:11-26 and answer the following questions.


How does Peter describe Jesus?

For what actions are the Jews accountable?

Read John 10:22-39. Where is Jesus speaking to the religious leaders and what is the gist of his accusation?

What does John 12:42-43 tell us of the religious leaders' (the Pharisee's) influence over the Jewish population?

What hope does Peter offer to the assembled Jews?

 What does Peter remind the Jews the penalty is for rejecting the Lord's servant (v.23) and what do you think it means?

What is it that the Jews should have known from Moses and all the prophets? Read Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Acts 4:4 tells us the result of Peter's speech. How many came to faith that day?

³ Holman Bible Dictionary

The religious leaders had rejected Jesus, proclaiming him a man not of God, but of the devil. In rejecting Jesus, God's son and Messiah, the Jews rejected God. They turned their back on God and insisted that good Jews throughout Jerusalem and Judea reject Jesus as well on pain of excommunication. The Jewish leaders' decision to kill Jesus (John 12:53) led the nation of Israel into apostasy: rejecting the Lord and his anointed.

Peter clearly and in no uncertain words explains the Jerusalem Jews' role in their rejection of the Messiah and their immense need to repent of their sin and turn to God.⁴ Upon recognizing their position in God's estimation the Jews must have been horrified in what they had been led to do. Peter eases the way by telling them they are not completely at fault; they followed the Pharisees in their ignorance. They still have an opportunity to repent and receive a time of refreshing, God will wipe away their sins and they will be cleansed of their hypocrisy and disobedience. They can be reconciled to the Lord.

Peter explains to the crowd how Moses and all the prophets starting with Samuel⁵ had foretold the coming of Messiah. The Jews had the benefit of hearing God's plan through the prophets and before all other nations; God sent his servant to them first. The Lord had chosen Israel to be a light to the other nations leading them to the Lord. This special relationship with the Lord was still theirs to claim even though they had rejected the Lord, if they repented of their sins. God's plan to bring salvation to the world depended greatly upon the Jews' response. In order for the Kingdom to be established on earth, Jews had to respond to the offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. Without their repentance, there could be no reconciliation. Without reconciliation there would be no one to send to the nations with the message of God's redeeming grace and the promise of eternal life. Jesus hadn't come to deliver Israel *from* the Romans; He had come to deliver them *to* the Kingdom of God.

Personal Reflection

What part did the Holy Spirit play in the events of today's scripture passage?

⁴ Only the Jerusalem Jews were ever given responsibility in Jesus' death. Paul speeches to the Jews of the Diaspora never charge them with guilt in Jesus' crucifixion – NAC.

⁵ Samuel was considered the first Prophets after Moses. Samuel anointed David, also considered at prophet. Peter is likely including Isaiah, Micah and Joel, among others in his allusion to the prophets who spoke of the Lord's Messiah in the image of the "Suffering Servant" (Isaiah 50, 53 and Psalm 22)

In the Viper's Nest

Peter's eloquent and moving speech drew not only the attention of the Jews in the temple court, but also the ears of some old enemies still lurking in the dark. While Peter's words were able to reach the hearts of many in the courtyard, there were some hearts that still couldn't be reached. The Holy Spirit was able to nudge some people in the right direction, but Jesus' enemies were still determined to remain in opposition to God's work. *Heavenly Father, as your daughter diligently pursues your word today, help her to come to an understanding of why some people will come to accept your presence and others persist in their rejection. Help her to become more finely attuned to your presence residing within her and to the promptings of your Spirit to share your Good News even when she may be afraid. Amen.*



Read Acts 4:1-22 and answer the following questions.

Why were Peter and John arrested?

What did the council question Peter and John about?

Describe Peter's response.

In verse 13, what did the Sanhedrin take note of?

What do we see is the actual reason Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin? (v.9)

Could the Sanhedrin deny that the healing had actually happened? Why not?



Why did the Jewish leaders want to stop the spread of the miraculous healing?

After Peter and John were admonished by the Sanhedrin, how did Peter and John respond?

The temple guard, the priests and the Sadducees all heard Peter and John speaking of Jesus being the Messiah. They couldn't openly stop the apostles for what they were claiming about Jesus, because they feared the creating a disturbance in the crowd; but, they could stop Peter and John on other grounds. Peter and John were arrested for teaching something in contradiction of the beliefs taught by the Sadducees: the resurrection of the dead. While that is partially true, the focus of the apostles was to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah. Peter and John were threatening the authority of the Jewish Leaders and they were drawing a large following, much as Jesus had done in his ministry. The healing and teaching rekindled the fear and consternation of the religious leaders. The next day Peter and John were brought before the very same council that had condemned Jesus. Peter, who had cowered in fear at Jesus' arrest, now spoke boldly proclaiming that by the name of Jesus, whom the Jews had crucified, the crippled man was healed. Talk about transformation! Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims from the midst of the vipers nest that it is Jesus who is salvation and that they are the vipers who killed the Lord's anointed! *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".(v.12)* The Sanhedrin was suddenly aware that the death of Jesus did not bring about the end of his influence in Jerusalem and that these two men had taken up his cause in his place.

The Sanhedrin could do little but attempt to intimidate the apostles. Their fear tactics yielded no result except a bold response to continue to obey God. If they were obeying God and doing his work, then the Sanhedrin must be in opposition to the will of God. The apostle's response in verse 19 reveals the Sanhedrin to be openly working against God and for their own selfish ends. Despite opposition, God's Word would be boldly proclaimed and the number of believers would continue to grow in leaps and bounds. We will see this theme reoccur time and again through the book of Acts. Fear and intimidation cannot keep Spirit filled men and women from proclaiming the Truth.

Personal Reflection

Verse 13 tells us that Peter and John were "unschooled, ordinary men". Unschooled means they are not of the learned stature of the Pharisees and Sadducees that make up the Sanhedrin. In comparison, they are "illiterate, country folk". Imagine yourself brought before 70 of the most wise, learned, and powerful men in the country. What would you be thinking and feeling? Read Peter's response to their allegations. Reflect upon how the Holy Spirit has used them in this setting.

Pray with Boldness

As Peter and John are released from the Sanhedrin we find them returning to their people. While certainly they must be relieved to be released by the Sanhedrin, it is interesting to note that they are not filled with fear. They had boldly proclaimed the truth, the Lord had delivered them and now they return to the other disciples. *Heavenly Father, as this Dear One prepares to study your Word, let your Spirit work in her to seek you first and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*



Read Acts 4:23-31 and answer the following questions.

What is it that the gathered disciples first acknowledge in their prayer to God?

Why is acknowledging God's sovereignty important?

What is it that the disciples pray for in verse 29?

What does it mean to "speak with boldness"?

And what is it they request in verse 30?

Read Luke 11:5-10. For what reason will the man's needs be met?


Read John 16:19-26. What is it Jesus tells his disciples in verses 23-26?

According to these verses, why is it that the disciples can make these requests with such boldness?

If they can speak with boldness, why do they need the Lord to heal and perform miracles?

Upon concluding their prayer what happened.

Why do you think their prayer was answered?

 What is the difference between this manifestation and filling of the Holy Spirit, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? Why a second filling of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer is the only connection by which the believers and apostles can connect with God and the Holy Spirit. They spend a good portion of their time in prayer together. Notice upon their release Peter and John return to their people and immediately begin to pray. They recognize that God, in his sovereignty, had fore-ordained the events surrounding the death and resurrection of the Messiah, as well as the actions of the men of the Sanhedrin in power. Their actions and choices were worked into God's sovereign plan, and God revealed his plan through his prophets. The disciples even recognized that their own persecution is part of God's plan.

When they pray, they ask for the Spirit to embolden them in the face of opposition. They knew that the opposition they were facing was just the beginning. They saw what had happened to Jesus, they knew well the threat they faced and that it very likely could cost their lives. I find it interesting that it is not for divine protection that they ask, but for boldly proclaiming the truth and for God to continue to heal and perform miraculous signs in the name of Jesus. They prayed that the power of the Holy Spirit be revealed to give weight to their words that Jesus is the Messiah and his Kingdom had come, just as it had been proclaimed. They knew their words and actions alone were not sufficient to surmount the evil of the powers that be. On their own they may be able to speak the truth, but they could be overcome by fear and then temper or even recant the truth. But working in alignment with the power of the Holy Spirit, they could do the work set before them as Jesus commissioned in Acts 1:8. Jesus instructed them to wait for the Holy Spirit which would give them the power and authority to be His witnesses, testifying to the truth of the resurrection and that indeed Messiah had come.

Instead of protection they seek an emboldened spirit, the ability to proclaim the truth in the face of opposition. This is a key theme throughout Acts. The weight of their testimony is strengthened by

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

the fact that they don't recant their faith when faced with floggings, imprisonment, and even death. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that they can withstand not only the physical aspects of the persecutions to come, but also the psychological aspects.

Personal Reflection

What has this passage taught you about praying boldly and the power of the Holy Spirit?