

Sermon: Lame men limping & rich men begging!

Reading: Acts 3:1-10

Introduction.

The book of Acts is often called the acts of the apostles as it covers the early years of the Church. Acts opens with the ascension of Jesus and the events of Pentecost which followed 10 days later when the disciples were anointed with the Holy Spirit. 3000 people were added to the Church after Peter preached. The numbers in the Church grew as people were added daily, but as the Church grew so did opposition.

Acts truly is a remarkable book and stands as a wonderfully testimony to the courage and boldness of the early Church. These heroes of faith were not extraordinary people in any way, but they did extraordinary things through the power of the Holy Spirit. This book is not so much acts of the apostles, but acts of the Holy Spirit. The end of chapter 2 provides us with an account of the daily life of a Christian, they would meet together each day for prayer, fellowship, teaching from the apostles and for breaking bread. The believers continuing commitment to meet together, learn about the faith, share what they had and meeting for prayer.

This was an exciting time for the early Church, you just never knew what was going to happen next. Our reading today picks up when Peter and John are heading into the temple to pray. On the way they meet a lame beggar at the gate called Beautiful. How different things are now, just a couple of weeks ago, these men were in a lockdown, living in fear by day and working by night to fish. But now we find Peter and John boldly entering the temple courts each day for prayer, Luke even records the time for us as 3:00 in the afternoon. No longer locked away but now visible and evangelising whenever the Spirit led them.

Gold and silver I have not.

The early Church was filled with prayer and a love for Jesus that power and blessings followed them. Prayer was essential to the way of life for the Church. Each time Peter preached numbers were added to the church. What was their secret? Did they make the sermons more palatable for the seeker sensitive or water it down for the easily offended? Did they devise clever church growth plans, sophisticated social action programs? The answer is, No! What we do see is a people who were fervent for Jesus, who loved each other with an affection that many looked upon and envied their closeness. The Scriptures tell us they met together daily, sharing what they had with one another, listening to the teaching of the apostles, breaking bread with thankful hearts and prayer. These men and women had a zeal for the gospel and a desire to live in a way that pleased God and reflected Jesus. Their faith witnessed to the glory of God and the Holy Spirit worked through them in mighty ways.

Back at the temple gate called Beautiful, a lame man was brought daily to beg from those who were heading into the temple. He was probably well known as people passed him by each day. This lame man sees Peter and John coming towards him and asks them for alms. Peter stopped and gets the man's attention saying, 'Look at me....' Peter said, "Gold and silver I have none, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk' (**Acts 3:6**). What happened next was startling, the man was helped up by Peter as his ankles became strong, standing steady he began to walk. An old preacher once said of this passage, it's the only time in Scripture that a begging man asked for alms and was given legs! The man stood up rejoicing. The passers by hearing the commotion as the

lame man began leaping and shouting praises to God. All who saw him were filled with wonder at what had happened. Did you notice after receiving this miraculous healing what the man did next? He didn't run home but joined Peter and John in prayer. That must have been one noisy prayer meeting! Imagine the loud whispers, 'That's the lame man, look at him now!' Then others asking, 'What happened, what's all the commotion about?' Peter and John are quick to point out this was nothing to do with them but everything to do with Jesus, for the healing was in His name. Peter never one to miss an opportunity for sharing Jesus!

God healed me!

Please don't misunderstand what I'm about to say. At times I read about people who say they thank God for their healing when they come out of hospital after spending days or weeks in ITU, or when they come through an operation and undergone months of chemotherapy and or physiotherapy. I don't want to undermine the joy of the persons healing, and it is right to give thanks to God in all situations, but I'm not convinced people who hear this testimony believe this healing is of God! They are aware it took a team of surgeons and wonderful nursing staff, along with the technology a whole load of pharmaceuticals to do the job. This they believe is more of a witness to skills of the medical profession, the NHS than of God? (I recognise maybe not in every case).

I often wonder if it leaves people thinking, you've got a very small, weak God who needs a hospital, a team of surgeons and nursing staff with all the technology we have available to help Him bring about the healing! As I said please don't get me wrong, it's right to give thanks to God, but I'm not convinced this testimony ever convinces the secular world as a witness to our God. However what does impact the secular world is when a Christian places their trust and confidence in God and are willing to accept whatever His will may be. As Paul writes, 'To live, is for Christ, to die is gain!' (**Phil 1:21**). It's the unshakable confidence Christians have in the face of death and their joy and peace in the times of trial and suffering which impacts the secular world around us more. When we can learn to praise God in all circumstances and praise Him for His love and many blessings in the midst of pain and suffering, this is a bold witness to a world so consumed by health and finding happiness and pleasures in this world, that when the Christian is not afraid to die, this blows their mind and they can't understand why the Christian is so calm. I have witnessed this through the lives of saints whose very lives have been a tremendous testimony to the staff working in hospitals and hospices and to their own families. In their dying, they speak of the love of Jesus and how they are longing to meet Him, no fear of death, but hope of everlasting life. When a Christian can speak of God's grace, love and mercy in times of suffering and even in the face of death, it is a powerful witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we compare the healing which involves medical teams, physiotherapy, drugs, counselling and many months to regain strength, how wonderful God's Kingdom is when a lame man sitting at the gate called Beautiful received his healing instantaneously. What is not immediately obvious, the lame man who was in his 40's didn't need to learn how to walk again, he went from being a lame man, to one who could walk, leap and jump instantly. No wonder the crowds who had gathered were filled with wonder at the miracle. Now that's a healing to convince any skeptic of God's sovereignty and power. Sadly although this healing of the lame man is a wonderful testimony to the power of God, it doesn't necessarily mean others will come to faith and follow Jesus! Remember in the gospels only one leper returned to thank Jesus for his healing when Jesus had healed 10!

Do miracles & healing still happen today? God doesn't change, He still heals today, although it is very rare. We still hear of amazing testimonies where God heals instantaneously. God uses miracles as a witness to His glory and to authenticate the His messengers. However when we read the Scriptures we notice there are seasons when God's power is displayed with great signs and wonders, and there are seasons when miraculous signs are very rare. For example before Moses miraculous signs and healing are rare, but when God calls Moses they abound. God gave Moses two miraculous signs to attest to his calling. He had a wooden staff which became a living snake and Moses' was able to perform a miraculous healing with a hand that turned leprous.

Interestingly Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform similar miraculous signs to discount Moses credibility, (so we should be careful, not all miraculous signs are from God). However Pharaoh magicians were unable to combat the plagues which came upon them from God.

There are times when God uses miracles and great wonders and times when these are rare, but one thing is constant, God still does is calls people to work out His divine purposes. The prophets Elijah and Elisha were God's messengers and had the ability to perform amazing miracles, such as the healing of Naaman the Syrian and the jar of oil that never empties. However there are other times when God calls people and no signs are given except by His word. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel performed no miracles but spoke the word of God uncompromisingly and God authenticated their calling through fulfilling the prophecies given them. When God wants to perform an amazing miraculous sign to authenticate the messenger He will do so as He chooses. It's not until Jesus comes do we truly see the power of the Kingdom of God in amazing ways. Jesus feeding multitudes with a couple of fish and five loaves, healing every type of disease, infirmity and disability. The pages of the Gospels are filled with mind blowing miracles, casting out evil spirits and even calming storms. Jesus was giving Israel a taste of the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:20).

At the day of Pentecost the apostles went out preaching and teaching and the Holy Spirit blessed their ministry and words by giving them power to heal and to drive out demons.

This great power authenticating the apostles message, that the Kingdom of God is near, repent and believe. Even the shadow Peter cast which fell across those who were sick were healed. And yet for all this, the apostles themselves did not have control of the Holy Spirit, for Paul was unable to heal Timothy as he advised him to take a little wine for his stomach.(1 Timothy 5:23). Was it because Timothy had a lack of faith he wasn't healed? The answer is definitely no! God sometimes works out His purpose in us, through life's circumstances which may include illnesses. Paul prayed 3 times for God to heal him of a thorn in his flesh but God tells him, He would not remove it as His grace was sufficient for him. (we don't know what the thorn in the flesh was, but it was something Paul wished to rid of). Sometimes we are given thorns in our flesh and these thorns may be God's way of us keeping humble, close to Him, learn patience and trust in God! We must remember God is not there to serve us which we sometimes forget, we are here to serve Him. We don't control the power of the Holy Spirit, He chooses to wrk through us when He wills it!

Rich men begging

I titled this sermon lame men limping and rich men begging. We have entered a different season today in the church, we have become so skeptical and even cynical about the supernatural power of God and think these things just don't happen any longer, so don't expect it. The attitude of the early Church was very different to our today. The disciples shared all they had with the Church, (See Acts 5) and yet today we hear of churches in the West, even those filled with wealth and riches, we hear them begging from anyone who will fund them. We see thermometers outside of churches, acceptance of grants from secular sources, lottery monies and appeals made in order to keep the church going. Rich

men today are begging from the secular world to fund God's work - is it just me that is bothered by this!! Twelve Centuries after Peter heals the lame man, the priest Thomas Aquinas visited the Pope at the time when large sums of money were being counted. The Pope boasted, "We need no longer say with Peter, 'Silver and gold I do not have'. To which Aquinas replied, "Neither can you say with Peter, 'Rise up and walk!'" This is what A.W Tozer meant when he said, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

I have been pondering why God has allowed the doors of the church to close and I believe God has given us time to reflect on our calling and where we have got of track. As Jesus called the church in Ephesus to repent and to get back to what they once were, they had lost their passion and zeal, their first love for Jesus and His message had grown cold. Maybe this is something we need to take notice of. The Church Jesus builds is to be established upon the rock of His gospel and His people are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. We are called by God out of the world and built together into a Holy Temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. We are to be guided and led by the Holy Spirit into the mission Jesus calls us to. Many churches in the west today resemble community centres and social clubs, rather than a missional movement.

Have we lost sight of what it is to be a holy people, bold in witness to Jesus and courageous in our walk of faith as His Church? Remember the early Church met together daily, praying together, breaking bread and listening to the teachings of the apostles, they were to be witnesses to Jesus saving grace - that is our call. If we can explain everything in our church life through our own efforts and strength, as good as it may be, should we not be a little concerned as to where is the presence of the supernatural, the Holy Spirit? Take a moment to ask, when was the last time I undeniably witnessed the Holy Spirit moving in or around us as followers of Jesus, both personally and within His Church? Hopefully I hear you say, last week when..... which is great as John Wesley used to say, 'if our testimony is more than two weeks old then its too old'. We should expect it!

An old Methodist Minister said, "What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organisations or more and novel methods, but men/women whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men/women of prayer, men/women mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men/women. He does not come on machinery, but on men/women. He does not anoint plans, but men/women -- men/women of prayer." (**E.M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer**).

Summary

The Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to the health and mission of Jesus' Church, when we neglect the Holy Spirit and prayer we soon lose the light and the darkness creeps in. Jesus warning to the church that had lost its first love is, if they didn't repent He will remove the lamp stand. (**Revelation 2:5**). Since the Lamp stand was the symbol of their existence as Christ's Church (**Rev 1:20**), its removal would symbolise Christ's removing them as His Church. When God opens the way for us to return to our churches again, may we return with a renewed sense of God's call upon our lives, be fervent in prayer and seeking the Holy Spirit, to lead us on in the mission, which is our great call and may we witness the power of the Holy Spirit in amazing ways for His glory. Don't you long for an out pouring of the Holy Spirit upon this nation again, to see lame walking and praising God and not rich men begging from the world for the church. Keep fervent in prayer and watch out for the work of the Holy Spirit, He is the same today, as yesterday and forever more. **Amen**