

In our previous passage we read about the nature of the early church. The people were devoted to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship with one another, to breaking bread together, and to prayer. The Apostles were performing miracles in Jesus' name. They were in awe of God, giving, and loving. They were full of the Holy Spirit. They were happy and full of joy. Others could see the difference Jesus had made in their lives, and as they shared their faith, people got saved.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke, in chapter three, records one of the miraculous signs that Peter performed, and how he used the event to preach the gospel to the Jews who were at the temple on that day. Tonight we will consider the first ten verses that record the healing event itself, and, through the word of God become witnesses to how God works. Please read along with me, Acts 3:1-10

The bible does not tell us how long after Pentecost this miracle took place; it just says it happened one day. It could have been days or weeks, maybe months later, but because of the proximity of the text, it was probably not that long after the Holy Spirit came. We know from chapter two that the people were in awe of the many miraculous signs performed by the Apostles, so this is an example of one of them.

Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer. There were several times of prayer during the course of the day when people had an opportunity to be in God's house to pray together. This does not necessarily mean that they only prayed at these times, because the end of chapter two tells us that the believers devoted themselves to prayer.

Prayer is ultimately a very intimate time that we spend with God. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we know that God listens to our prayers, and through experience we learn that He answers our prayers. If our relationship with the Lord is to be all that it should be, our prayer life must be persistent. We reach out to our heavenly Father in all situations, and every circumstance, as we share our lives with Him.

This personal time of prayer does not negate our need for corporate prayer as well. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there will I be also." God very well may bring about a desired result when the individual prays, but there are spiritual dynamics at play that sometimes requires people agreeing in prayer together in order to effect a desired change.

This is why we have a prayer chain, and a prayer list that is made available to the church family on Wednesday nights. This is why we incorporate public prayers in all of our worship services. This is why you can go into any Sunday School Class, and they will open and close their hour together in prayer. This is why we pray together around the family table. If we want the power of God in our lives, and in our church, we have to be devoted to prayer, privately and corporately.

Verse two tells us that there was a man there who had been crippled from birth. This man was in a hopeless situation. He had never been able to walk. He had no way to work in order to support himself or his family if he had one. He could not get around on his own, so friends, or family members, carried him to the Beautiful Gate, in order for him to beg for money. A big part of the Jewish practice of faith was to give money to those who were less fortunate, and genuinely in need. This was not always done out of a sense of compassion, but as a sense of duty. Giving in this way was a requirement of the law, and you might not seem righteous in the eyes of others, if you did not publically demonstrate your generosity.

The Beautiful Gate was probably the Eastern Gate, which opened into the Court of the Gentiles. Most people would pass through the Eastern Gate as they entered the temple and it was a perfect place to beg because it gave the beggar the most exposure to the most people.

Being generous to others is as righteous act today as it was in the days of the early church. We want to use the resources the Lord gives us, and apply them in ministry to others, but we have to be careful to invest in the kingdom of God, and give to people who have a legitimate need. Not everyone is who he or she appears to be. Not every who comes with their hand out is being totally honest, and many will take advantage of people with generous hearts. Some people run scams, for a free handout, so that they don't have to work.

In the context of this passage of scripture, the man crippled from birth had a legitimate need. He had no opportunity to provide for himself apart from begging, and he had been doing it all of his life. Do you think that he was the only person begging at the entrance to the temple on that day, probably not? If Peter could heal this man, why didn't he heal the others?

There are those in our culture who claim that they have a healing ministry. They claim that they can lay their hands on a person, or pray over some object, like a cloth, and send it to the person, or shout out over the television, and God will heal them. In years distant past, there were some people, who were members of this church, who were desperate for a medical miracle. They traveled to South Florida to a Benny Hen service in order to receive healing from their cancer. Eventually the cancer took their lives.

Of course the whole church family prayed for them right up until the time of their passing. If we have the love of Christ for our brothers and sisters in the faith, we must pray for one another, and sometimes God gives us the miracle. Those who seek financial gain, through offering the false hope of a healing ministry, put the blame on their victims when the healing does not come. It's not the healer's fault. They argue that person who was sick just didn't have enough faith.

So, what is different in this encounter that Peter and John had with a man who had been crippled from birth? Consider the context. The Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus' words back in chapter one. Wait in Jerusalem and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and the outermost parts of the world. As they devoted themselves in prayer, and yielded themselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, God gave them discernment to demonstrate His power in the life of this particular man, so that Peter would have another opportunity to lead unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ.

God is not in the wholesale business of healing everybody, in every situation. He is loving and compassionate, but the answer to our prayers must fit into the greater context of His will, and His plans for the future. In every instance, Jesus Christ is to be glorified, not the person who is doing the praying.

The beggar had only one perceived need, money. He lived day to day, from one handout to another. God saw the greater need in this man's life, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, He revealed His will to Peter. Peter, in faith, responded to that will.

Peter looked straight at the man and said, "Look at us." While Peter is doing the talking, the plural pronoun "us" indicates that Peter and John were in agreement and of the same Spirit. Both men were aware of the movement of God, and they had the faith to speak the words that would bring about the crippled man's healing.

Verse six says, "Then Peter said, 'Gold or silver I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" This man was asking for loose change in

order to feed himself for that day, but God had a greater plan for his life. Chapter four tells us that this man was over forty years old, and for the first time in his life, he was able to walk. What is not spelled out in the text is that this man would never again need to beg, because he became physically able to work to provide for himself. Notice also that the miracle came in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus gets the glory, because He gives the miracle.

When God brings a miracle to our lives, in answer to our prayers, we must discipline ourselves to consider God's greater purpose. The bible says that Peter helped the man to his feet, his ankles became strong, he walked, and went into the temple courts, walking, jumping, and praising God. This man was so thankful, and he gave God the praise and the glory for the miracle in his life.

When God answers our prayers and brings a miracle in our lives, we must acknowledge Him, and give Him the praise, glory, and honor he deserves. Too often I have prayed for someone or some situation, only to feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit later, that I failed to truly thank God and worship Him for the answered prayer.

People sometimes ask me if I think that God is still in the business of doing miracles today. Of course He is. The problem is that we sometimes get so busy, and distracted, by the concerns of life that we fail to recognize, or acknowledge, the miracle when it comes. If we are so caught up in our own little world that we can't see the answer to our prayers, we will not give the Lord the glory and the credit He deserves. If we do not testify to the lost world of the power of God in people's lives and circumstances, the lost world will take no notice, and nothing will be done to advance the kingdom of God. If God's purpose is not going to be advanced, why should He answer our prayers the way we ask?

We expect God to answer our prayers without considering what He expects from us. I think that this is an often-overlooked truth that robs us of the power that God might otherwise demonstrate in our prayer lives. As we lift our hearts to the Lord in faith, we should have the expectation that God is going to answer that prayer. We must receive His answer with thanksgiving, and praise, and be willing to share what God has done with others, so that they may be encouraged, and have hope.

The beggar wanted money, but God gave him a new life. The first thing the man did was to use the blessing God had given him to demonstrate the power of God in his life. He was celebrating and praising God. By his actions, he became a witness to everyone who was at the temple that day. He testified to the lost concerning the healing power of Jesus Christ.

If you are my brother or sister in Christ, God has already done the greatest of all miracles in your life. You were once lost in your sins, but you have been born again. When you trusted Jesus as Savior, and Lord, God forgave you of all of your sins. He set His seal of ownership in your soul through the presence of His Holy Spirit. The power of God to raise Jesus from the dead is at work in you as well. You are a child of the king, and you have a testimony to share with the lost world that will bring glory, honor, and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. God can use the testimony of your life, and the truth of your salvation, to help others see their need to come to Jesus so that they too might experience the miracle in their lives.

To aid in the effectiveness of our witness, we should use in our arsenal the testimony of the great miracles of God that may be seen in the answer to our prayers. We must remain alert to the movement of the Holy Spirit. We must always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.

The hope that we have is found in our faith in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God provided the means for the forgiveness of our sins, so that He could give us eternal life. God was pleased to

allow all of His fullness to dwell in Jesus. Jesus lived as a man, but without sin. According to God's plan and purpose, Jesus became the only perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus took the penalty for our sin in His flesh, when He was nailed to the cross. He secured victory over sin and death by His resurrection from the grave. He is coming again, and maybe very soon, so we all need to get ready. If you have not trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, confess your sin to God. With His help, turn away from sin and toward Jesus. Trust in Christ and His sacrifice. Ask Jesus to come into your heart to save you. If you have wandered away from the Lord, confess it and return to Him, so that the miracle can happen to you.