

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 21st June 2009 - 11:30am
Acts 3:1 – 4:4 There is Power in the Name of Jesus

Introduction

So far in the Acts of the Apostles, we have seen the Lord Jesus Christ ascend to heaven after rising from the dead, and having appeared to his disciples during a period of 40 days, proving that he was indeed alive again.

Then in Acts ch.2 The Day of Pentecost arrived, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers. Then Peter got up to preach, and 3000 people got saved, were baptised as believers and added to the church in Jerusalem.

But now the **Acts** of the Apostles really begin as we come into ch.3.

Here we have the story of the lame man who was healed by Peter and John outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple in Jerusalem.

You probably know the chorus:

*Peter and John went to pray,
They met a lame man on the way,
He asked for alms, and held out his palms,
And this is what Peter did say:*

*Silver and gold have I none,
But such as I have give I thee,
'In the name of Jesus Christ, of Nazareth,
Rise up and Walk!'*

*He went walking and leaping and praising God,
Walking and leaping and praising God.
'In the name of Jesus Christ, of Nazareth,
Rise up and Walk!'*

That little chorus just tells the story, doesn't it?
It's recorded for us in Acts 3:1-11... This was, first of all,

1. A Miraculous Sign (v.1-11)

v.1 – Peter and John were still involved in the Temple worship at this stage. They were on their way up to the Temple at one of the normal times of prayer. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

v.2 – As was quite common in those days, and indeed in many cities to this day, there were poor people begging for money or a bit of food by the side of the road. But this particular man had to be carried to this spot every day by some friends because he was lame and couldn't walk at all.

But he had one of the best places in the whole city. Just outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, where so many people would pass by, and feeling

religious, they might just be in the mood to give to charity, to give some alms, and so he stood a very good chance of getting some help there, daily.

v.3 – When the lame man saw Peter and John coming along, and about to go into the Temple, he put out his hand, and asked them for money.

v.4 – Now I don't know about you: How do you respond when you come across someone begging in the streets? It was a very common sight in many of the cities in Africa that I visited over the last few years. I remember the first time Ken and I went to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We were told not to give to children in the streets, because they were often part of a large gang. Their leaders would often maim the children in some very visible way, and then send them out onto the streets to beg, to get money, which they then had to bring back into the coffers of the gang. It was like an organised business. And of course Westerners like u, looked like tourists, so we were the main targets. The little coins of the local currency that we had in our pockets, were worth so little in our money back home, that it seemed heartless not to give them something, so sometimes I did. I just slipped a coin into their little outstretched hand and went on my way. But most tourists and other local people wouldn't even look at the children at all. They would just put their heads down, or look the other way, and walk on. So sometimes we were faced with a dilemma.

But look what Peter does in v.4: *'Peter looked straight at him, as did John.'* He was going to take an interest in this man at the side of the road. Then Peter said to him: *'Look at us!'* – Something that many beggars are so ashamed to do, especially in the well to do parts of cities. They keep their heads down, and their faces hidden, and all you see is a hand held out from a bundle of rags.

But Peter said, *'Look at us!'* - He wanted to engage with this man.

v.5 – So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Now, what was going to happen next...?

v.6 – Well it was then that Peter said, ***'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!'*** In other words, Peter was saying, I might not have much money to give you, but I'm going to give you something even more important, of even greater value, so in the name of Jesus Christ, walk!

v.7 - And at that he helped him up onto his feet – for the first time in many years. He had been lame from birth! In fact he was over 40 yrs old! (4:22).

v.8 - Immediately his ankles and feet were restored to strength and he was able to stand. More than that, he was literally able to 'leap like a deer' – That's

a very clear fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah ch.35:6 *'Then will the lame leap like a deer'!!* This was more than a miracle – it was a **sign** that the Messiah had come! Now this man was able to go into the Temple Courts, walking and leaping and praising God! He was just full of the fact that he had been healed! He wanted to show everybody, tell everybody, and praise God for what had happened to him in the name of Jesus!

v.9-10 – Of course when all the people saw him walking about and praising God, they could hardly believe it! They knew he was the same man they had just walked past at the gate – the one who they had ignored there because he was sitting begging. *Then* he probably disgusted them, but *now* they are filled with wonder and amazement at him – and at what had happened to him.

v.11 – While the beggar couldn't thank Peter and John enough, all the people who had seen him, came running to Peter and John into a place known as Solomon's Colonnade. It's thought that this was the place where the early believers met for fellowship and worship, just outside the Temple itself.

Let's just pause for a moment and ask what was going on in this story?

Why does Dr Luke record this story for us here at this time and place?

- It was a healing – a miracle - **a sign** that the Messiah had come. The Apostles performed **signs and wonders** (Acts 2:43). We'll see tonight in John's Gospel, when we look at the changing of water into wine in John ch.2 that Jesus' miracles while he was here on earth were called **signs** as well. Signs to point to Jesus; signs to prove the Messiah had come; signs to leave on-lookers without excuse.
- It caused **a stir** – among the people – especially those at the Temple. So much so that it gathered a crowd immediately. It got their attention.
- It was **a testimony** aimed at those who were still going about their Temple worship, despite what the religious leaders there had just done in collaborating with the Roman authorities (the Gentiles) to have Jesus, their Messiah, put to death on a cruel Roman cross.
- This was **a miraculous sign sent to challenge them**, to bear witness against them, but as well as that – *to give them another opportunity to respond, and to trust in Christ.* That's how patient our God is!

So in the light of all that, Peter takes this opportunity to preach his second sermon: (v.12ff)

2. A Challenging Sermon (v.12-26)

There are a number of sermons recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles. We have already seen Peter preach his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. On that occasion it was the believers speaking in tongues – other languages – that had caused the stir and attracted the crowd. Some of the onlookers accused them of being drunk, so that was Peter's starting point then. Silencing the critics because it was only 9 in the morning, and then going on to explain from the OT Book of Joel that this was in fact the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. With the result that 3000 people got saved that day as Peter went on to preach about Christ, and challenge these people about their sin and their need to repent and be baptised.

Now in Acts ch.3 it's the healing of this lame man, who everyone had known as 'the beggar who sat at the Beautiful Gate' that had caused the stir. A crowd gathers, and before long Peter takes his opportunity, by saying, *'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?'*

And straight away he turns his sermon to point this crowd to Christ:

'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers...'

(He's on safe ground so far: they were all Jews, descended from Abraham.) Peter and John were Jews too, so they had the right to speak in the Temple precincts. But his next statement just sets them apart – This God, the God of our Fathers – ***'has glorified his servant Jesus!'*** (v.13).

Immediately he has got them to the crux of the matter:

What have you done with Christ?

That is still the crux of the matter for each and every one of us here today:

What have you done with Christ? Or what will you do with Christ?

(i) What had these people done with Christ? (vs.13b-16)

'You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.' (v.13)

That's what they had done with Jesus. They handed him over to be put to death by crucifixion – the most inhumane way anybody could die! Even though Jesus was a Jew – they disowned him before Pilate – handing him over to the Gentile ruling authorities to be put to death on a cross. Even though Pilate was going against his better judgement – three times he insisted that he could find nothing wrong with Jesus – no reason to put him to death. But it was because the Jewish crowd kept shouting *'Crucify Him, Crucify Him!'* that Pilate eventually gave in, fearing a riot, and sealed his death warrant. That's what these people had done with Jesus – They were guilty!

'You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.' (v. 14)

To add insult to injury, when Pilate thought he had found a way out of his dilemma, by offering to release one prisoner to them at the time of the Passover, the crowd went against him again, and demanded that Barabbas – a known criminal and murderer – be released, while the innocent one, Jesus, be condemned to death. An unholy, unrighteous man was released in exchange for the Holy, Righteous Messiah! Justice was turned on its head that day! But something else was turned on its head – read the next verse:

*'You killed the author of life, **BUT GOD** raised him from the dead! We are witnesses of this.'*

Jesus was the author of life – the crowd demanded him to be put to death, but when he was dead and buried, God raised him back to life again. God overturned the injustice that day – and yet again the Apostles claimed they were witnesses of that very fact – Jesus was alive. He had defeated death!

And what's more... Not only is Jesus alive from the dead, but He now has the power to heal, just as much as when he went about doing good here on earth:

In fact - it is *'by faith in the name of Jesus'* that *'this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see!'* (v. 16)

Peter was declaring – There is power in the name of Jesus! – power to heal, power to save, and power to raise from the dead – power to give eternal life! The healing of this lame man, just outside one of the main entrances to the Temple, was a witness to the fact that Jesus was alive, and that he was able to heal and to save. So...

(ii) What should these people now do with Christ? (vs.17-21)

Well, it seems here as if Peter is softening the blow of his challenging sermon. It's as if he had the crowd squirming like worms on his hook. All he had to do was to reel them in. But he doesn't. He gives a little bit of ground. He says that they did all this in ignorance. They didn't realise what they were doing. So now God was going to give them another opportunity to repent, to turn to God, to trust in this Jesus who they had earlier rejected. Now they were going to have the opportunity to know him and receive him as Lord and Saviour of their lives.

Peter points out in v.18 that regardless of all the terrible things these people had done, as far as their treatment of Jesus was concerned, God was in it!

What had happened to Jesus was in fact all part of God's fore-ordained plan.

'This is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.' (v.18)

This was the bit the Jews, not even their religious leaders, ever got! It's as if passages like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 had not been in their Bibles! We'll be looking at Psalm 22 on Wednesday week in our prayer meeting. It is a Psalm that clearly foretells how the Christ would suffer and die – it describes death by crucifixion hundreds of years it was ever invented by the Romans! Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah, the suffering servant being led like a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he would open not his mouth. Looking back it is every clear that God foretold through the prophets in the OT how his Messiah would suffer and die, and yet the Jewish religious leaders never got that bit. All they were looking for was for the Messiah to come as a political conquering hero to set up his throne in Jerusalem and to overthrow the Roman occupation and set them free! They were looking for **their** Messiah, not **His** Messiah (v.18) (God's Messiah!) They got it so wrong, because they were looking for the wrong thing.

So what should the people do now? Well Peter tells them in v.19:

'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.' (v.19-21)

We used to talk about God wanting to wipe their slate clean. In the days of Tipp-Ex we might have talked about God wanting to blot out or cover up their sins, but in this computer age, we could quiet easily say, God wants to press the delete button – he wants to erase it from their memory and his. He wants to wipe out their sins – just as if they had never happened in the first place! That's what God was offering these people that day in Acts ch.3, and that's what He still offers to each one of us here today in 2009:

**Your sins can be wiped out, erased, deleted, if only you will repent:
– turn from all you know to be wrong, and turn to God instead.**

Are you prepared to do that this morning?

If you are then God says *'that times of refreshing will come from the Lord.'*

Do you need refreshed this morning? Do you need a fresh start with God?

Then come to Christ, turn from your sin, turn to God, and know his forgiveness for all your sins right now!

Peter went on to say to these Jewish people that day, that if they did repent of their sins, and turn to God, that He would *'send the Christ who has been appointed for [them] – even Jesus.'* (v.20)

Jesus was their Messiah. They had missed him, they had refused him, they had put him to death. Right now he is in heaven, and he must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything – again – as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

That's where Jesus is still today – he's in heaven. He's waiting for that time when God will restore everything to himself. When God calls time on this world, wraps everything up, and sends his Son the Lord Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to bring us home to be with him for all eternity, and then to destroy everyone else and everything else in this old world. This world is coming to an end – the important thing is that we are ready, and that we have trusted in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour before that day comes.

(iii) What Biblical grounds had Peter got for saying all this? (vs.22-26)

Well he goes right back to God's promise to Abraham away back in Gen.12. Look at v.25-26. God promised away back then that ***'through Abraham's seed or offspring all peoples on earth would be blessed.'*** It was through the descendants of Abraham – the Jews – that the whole world should have heard about the Messiah – the Saviour of all mankind. But they failed to do so! But Abraham's seed (singular) was in fact Jesus himself – a Jew – a descendant of Abraham, who came and who died, but who rose again. And now anyone who puts their trust in Him will be blessed. This promise is not just for Jews who will believe – it's for all peoples – all nations. This good news must go to all nations now, through those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour. According to v.26 the Jews were getting the first opportunity, but later on in the Acts, when they by and large rejected the offer, God sent his Apostles to the Gentiles instead.

But in v.22, Peter also reminds them of a prophecy of Moses from Deut 18:

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.'

(That's Jesus – but...)

'Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

'Indeed (v.24) all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.'

So basically Peter has called 3 key OT Prophets as his witnesses:

Abraham promised blessing not only for the Jews, but also for all nations, through one of his descendants – Jesus!

Moses promised that one like him would rise up from among his people – they were to listen to him – Jesus!

But if they failed to listen to him, respond to him, put their trust in Him, then they would be cut off from among their people.

And **Samuel** and all the others prophets spoke of these things too.

So what was going to be their reaction to Peter's second sermon?

What was going to happen now? How would they respond?

3. A Divided Response (4:1-4)

We'll look more at this next time, but very briefly this morning, I want you to notice that there was a divided reaction to what Peter had just said:

Broadly speaking the Jewish religious authorities wanted to silence this kind of talk, and this sort of preaching (vs.1-3).

The priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and the Sadducees interrupted Peter's sermon (v.1)

What were they most annoyed about? (v.2)

*'They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and **proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead!***

They couldn't deny the crucifixion, but they objected strongly to the very idea that Jesus could rise from the dead, or that he could raise anyone else from the dead. The Resurrection was going to be the battleground for the coming days in the Acts of the Apostles. That's why these apostles were so clear that they had been sent by Jesus to be witnesses of his resurrection. And that's why they were prepared to even go to prison for it!

And that's exactly what happened in the very next verse: (v.3)

Peter and John are arrested and they spend their first night in prison because they dared to preach the Gospel!

But as I said the response to Peter's sermon was divided. The religious authorities may have rejected and opposed it, but the ordinary people who saw the healing and heard the sermon – were now ready to believe.

Luke is keen to point out that by this stage there were now 5000 men who had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. What about you? Are you one of them?

Christianity is not just for women and children: Men, it's time to believe!

