

Acts 3 & 4a

Read Acts 3:1-11

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon.

We are given no clue as to the length of the ‘golden time’ that the new church enjoyed. This event could have taken place immediately, during the feast of Pentecost, or some months later.

It seemed like a normal day, going up to the temple to pray (this would be in the temple courts, not the main temple building itself).

2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

It was a normal day too, for the unnamed lame man. Obviously he had friends or family who were prepared to do this for him, and they had chosen a good pitch where those who were more devout would pass – those who were more likely to give alms to a lame beggar. I imagine that after several years he had become a recognised fixture (sorry – no-one knows which gate was the ‘Beautiful’ gate).

3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Where I live, occasionally there are those who sit at the side of the road begging. Without exception, they don’t look directly at you. They simply speak loudly enough to draw your attention.

Why is that?

Could it be that avoiding a face-to-face confrontation gives better results?
Or are they so used to refusals that it is just not worth bothering to look up?

Verse two tells us that he was carried there every day – presumably for several years; in which case Jesus would also have walked past him on his way into the Temple. But the lame man didn’t look up, and he only asked for money.

When we come to God in prayer what is our attitude? Do we miss out by not looking up? Do we ask for the same old things: ‘give us each day our daily bread’ or do we ask if the Lord has something new that he has prepared for us?

There are many places in the bible where on ‘looking up’ someone suddenly sees something which had not been there before – often God’s miraculous provision. Some references are given in the appendix at the end of the study on Genesis 18. (It might make an interesting study in itself!)

4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’

5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

In John chapter 13, following the meal in the upper room, we read of Jesus predicting Peter's denial. In the next chapter Jesus then went on to teach his disciples:

'12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'

He then went on to teach about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit, now living in Peter, had transformed him. His confidence was no longer in his own strength, but wholly in the Lord. Now in the name of Jesus he was able to command the lame man to walk.

We were told (v2) that the man had a life-long disability preventing him from walking. Now the nerves, muscles, sinews and bones which had never properly developed were immediately made perfect.

8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

A totally unrestrained (and noisy!) expression of his joy and relief. He had been set free from the condition that had bound him all his life, now he could do nothing but praise God with his whole being.

9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

People had specifically gathered in the temple courts for prayer. What was this disturbance all about? When they saw who he was they immediately recognised him – he was so well known.

11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.



http://www.bible-history.com/jerusalem/firstcenturyjerusalem_royal_porticoes.html

Solomon's colonnade was a covered area on the east side of the Temple courtyard 600 ft long, and was often used by rabbis when teaching their groups of disciples (see John 10:23, Acts 5:12). It may have been a recognised place of meeting for the new Christians. As the crowd gathered Peter grasped the opportunity to preach.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9h0odubFVg>

Remember, he was preaching to God-worshipping Jews who would have regularly come to the Temple for afternoon prayers.

So when Peter quoted from the prophets the passages would have been well-known to them.

Now read Acts 3:12-26

What were Peter's main points? (Suggested answers in blue)

12 *When Peter saw this, he said to them: 'Fellow Israelites, 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?*

Peter and James were people just like them- 'fellow Israelites' and they had no special powers, nor were they particularly 'godly'

13 *The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.*

God (not some new god, but the God of their fathers) had glorified Jesus by healing the man. It was the power of their God, through the name of Jesus.

You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

'You handed him over . . . you disowned him . . . you disowned . . . You killed.' They were all in some way responsible for the death of Jesus (are we too?).

Jesus died, but God raised him to life.

We are witnesses of this.

'we are witnesses' – two witnesses were needed for facts to be accepted.

16 *By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.*

It was by faith in the name of Jesus that the man was healed – maybe not the man's faith, but that of Peter and John.

17 'Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

The people and their leaders had acted in ignorance, but by repentance and faith, they too could be saved.

18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. 21 Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, "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. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people."

24 'Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'

All this had been prophesied and the blessings of the covenant were now being poured out to those who would believe. (Acts 3:22-23 see Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19; Acts 3:25 see Genesis 22:18; 26:4

IF YOU WISH, THIS STUDY COULD BE STOPPED HERE AND RESUMED NEXT TIME.

If so, first read Acts 3:1-9.

Acts 4 First read verses 1-21

1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

Anyone drawing together a noisy crowd was likely to be trouble, so those responsible for 'Temple Security' soon appeared.

2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

What was it that 'greatly disturbed' them?

The Priests, guards and Sadducees were, more than any, responsible for the death of Jesus. They had hoped that his 'movement' would have died with him. For the Sadducees, to hear that he had come alive again and that resurrection (which they emphatically denied) was a fact and was for everyone, undermined their whole belief system.

3 They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

From verses 10 and 14 we could also infer that they imprisoned the man who had been healed. It was the natural response of those in authority; imprison the troublemakers, the crowd would soon disperse and things would return to normal.

4 But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The authorities hadn't taken the Holy Spirit into account. While Peter and John were being led away, conviction fell on the crowd and many more were added to the believers.

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

Those who had arrested Peter and John would have been aware that following the crucifixion of Jesus a couple of months ago, any of his followers continuing in his place could potentially cause trouble, so a full meeting of the Sanhedrin was convened (v15). These would have been the same people who had sentenced Jesus to death.

6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'

This was a trick question – it was not a crime to teach or heal in the Temple, but to promote any God other than Jehovah would be blasphemy.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people!'

Peter was totally fearless. The indwelling Holy Spirit opened his mouth and spoke for him:

9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Were they surprised to hear this? Probably not – it simply confirmed their deepest fears. They all knew of the miracles that Jesus had performed while he was alive. Yes they had crucified Jesus, and worryingly they all knew that the tomb was now empty. They were well aware of the stories of Jesus' resurrection that were circulating. They had all hoped that this would all have 'gone away', but now it had all blown up again – and in their own temple!

What was more, they knew all recognised man standing there, and they knew that he had been miraculously healed.

Peter continued by quoting Psalm 118:22:

11 Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

This was not the first time the authorities had heard this; Jesus himself had told the 'chief priests and elders of the people' that this scripture referred to himself (see Matthew 21:23, 42-45). They would also have known that the quote from Psalms 118 continued: 'the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'

Because of their schooling they would also have been able to quote from memory the prophecy in Isaiah 28.

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.'

Jesus was their long looked-for messiah and he is the one who can 'present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy' (Jude 1:24) – remember that this was even more of a problem for the Sadducees who denied the whole concept of resurrection.

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Notice again that these intelligent, powerful leaders of the people were 'astonished'. They noted specifically that Peter and John were known to have been with Jesus during his ministry.

14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

There was no denying that the man had been healed – he was **standing** there. Everyone knew him from before when he was a lame beggar, and now everyone had seen him running, jumping and praising God.

15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

Why didn't they ask the question: 'could there be any truth in this teaching'? Even if they wondered, no-one would ask for fear of being ridiculed by the others.

16 'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.'

Their response was to 'stop this thing from spreading'! They were so entrenched in their 'I'm right so you're wrong' mentality that they couldn't accept that what they had witnessed was from God, even though everyone else could (V21).

Note 'this thing': it showed that they also recognised that something had happened to a vast crowd of people in such a short time, and they were totally perplexed as to what it was, or even how they should respond.

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

It was hard for the authorities to deny that Jesus (who they had crucified) had had miraculous powers during his time of ministry. They were also aware that it was in the name of Jesus that the lame man had been healed. More than that

a strange change had taken place in the lives of many thousands of people in the last few days.

19 But Peter and John replied, 'Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'

Actually, one of the Pharisees: Gamaliel, began to consider the implications (we will read about this in chapter 5), but for now he kept quiet.

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Is our response to the work of Jesus in our lives: 'we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'?