

A LAME EXCUSE FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Acts 3:1-26

The book of Acts began with a promise. The promise was that the Spirit would come and the disciples of Jesus would receive power. This power was the outward visible sign that the kingdom of God had come.

That power was displayed in chapter 2 in two different ways. It was displayed in the gift of tongues when believers began to speak in languages which they had not learned in a natural manner. It was displayed again in the sudden and remarkable growth of the infant church. Now it shall be displayed in the healing of a lame man. There is an interesting comparison to be made between chapter 2 and chapter 3.

Acts 2	Acts 3
Begins at the 3rd hour, the time of the morning sacrifice	Begins at the 9th hour, the time of the evening sacrifice
Spirit given to believers	Healing given to a lame man
Tongues-speakers praising God	Formerly lame man praising God
People gather in amazement and perplexity	People filled with wonder and amazement
Peter proclaims the Gospel	Peter proclaims the Gospel

In both chapters, there is a miraculous event which takes place and which arouses the interest of the people. In both chapters, Peter takes the opportunity to explain the events in the light of the risen Christ.

SETTING FOR A SERMON

¹ *Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.*

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And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. (Acts 3:1-2).

The church had been growing. But they had no building of their own. They had been meeting from house to house and in the Temple. The Temple had a very large outer court known as the Court of the Gentiles. It was given this designation because Gentiles were permitted into this section but could come no further. The Court of the Gentiles was large enough to hold many thousands of people.

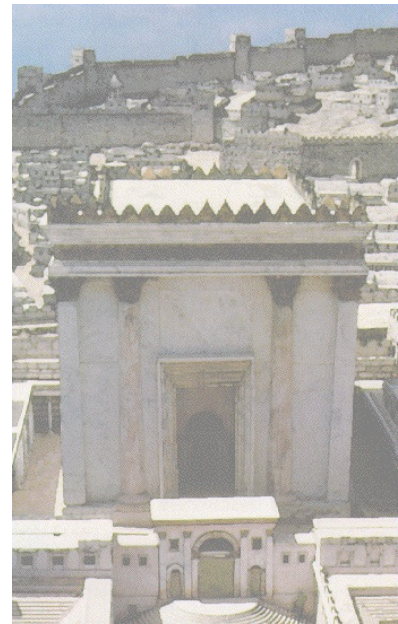
Peter and John were coming to the Temple at the ninth hour. Even though he is himself a Greek, Luke uses Jewish time to designate the hour of the day. According to the Jewish reckoning of time, the ninth hour took place nine hours after sunrise - about 3 in the afternoon or when the sun was setting about halfway toward the horizon.

This was the time of the evening sacrifices. Every morning and every evening, there were sacrifices offered in the temple. A sacrifice would be offered, an animal slain, its blood applied to the altar before the Temple, and then a priest would enter the Temple in order to offer incense upon the altar. This incense would fill the temple with a pleasing aroma and would represent the sweet smell of the prayers of God's people ascending to heaven.

It was the time of the sacrifice - the time of prayer. It was also the time at which Jesus had died. Perhaps this was why Peter and John had chosen this time to come to participate in the prayers.

There was another man who had also come. He was a lame beggar. He had been lame his entire life. Verse 2 says that he had been lame "*from his mother's womb.*" He was now over 40 years old (Acts 4:22). He had been lame all of that time. He had never been able to hold down a job. There was no work that he was able to do.

There was no social security in effect. There was no welfare system. This man made a living the only way he could - by begging. He sat by the Gate Beautiful, just outside the



Jewish Christians would continue to be involved in the worship within the Temple until its destruction in 70 A.D.

Court of the Women. The offering boxes where people brought their tithes and offerings were located just within this gate. He was trying to catch them just before they gave their offerings so that he might receive some small portion from them.

If this man came on a regular basis to beg at the Temple, then he would have been there 2 months earlier when Jesus came. Jesus never healed this man. Why? Perhaps because the man never asked. It seems to have been the custom of Jesus to heal only those who asked for healing.

It is likely that Peter and John had walked past this man many times. Perhaps they had given money to him in the past. This time they are going to give him a great deal more.

THE BEGGAR'S REQUEST

3 *When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.*

4 *But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!"*

5 *And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.*

6 *But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene -- walk!" (Acts 3:3-6).*

There is an interesting chain of terms that describe people looking and seeing in these verses.

- Peter and John fix their gaze on the man (3:4).
- Peter says, "Look at us" (3:4).
- The man begins to give them his attention (3:5).

This man was a cripple. He had been a cripple all his life and he was regularly seated here where he could collect alms. People were so used to seeing him that I imagine they were not even seeing him any longer. He had become part of the regular temple scene. He was used to being ignored. The man was asking for alms, but he wasn't even looking at them. He wasn't expecting to be healed. He was only asking for money. Though he was seated outside of the Temple of God, he was not expecting to experience the power of God.

We are often like that man. We are in a "business as usual" mode. We come to church and we don't really expect God to do anything extraordinary. We pray normal prayers

and we would be shocked if God answered in a dramatic way.

This man's prayer wasn't actually answered. He did not ask to be healed. He only wanted a few coins. Peter confesses that he has no money to give. He has nothing but the power of God and that is quite enough.

The story is told of how Thomas Aquinas once called on Pope Innocent II when the latter was counting out a large sum of money. "You see, Thomas," said the Pope, "the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" "That is true," replied Thomas; "but neither can she now say, 'Rise and walk.'"

Before we begin to look down our noses at our Roman Catholic brothers, let me remind you that for the most part, we Protestants cannot say, "What I do have I give to you." Let's face it, the world is not coming to the church today because of its great power or because of its giving heart. But if we ever do develop this kind of giving heart, they will come to see what it is that empowers us.

AN ASTOUNDING HEALING

- 7 *And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and*
immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.
- 8 *With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the*
temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.
- 9 *And all the people saw him walking and praising God; 10 and they*
were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful
Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and
amazement at what had happened to him.
- 11 *While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together*
to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. (Acts 3:7-
11).

This healing took place immediately. Doctor Luke says that the lame man stood upright "with a leap." He was so excited that he continued to jump up and down as he entered the Temple with Peter and John. This commotion quickly drew attention. The crowd which had gathered to worship and to pray began to recognize this man.

Verse 11 says that he was "clinging to Peter and John." This may have been because, while his legs had been strengthened to permit him to walk, he was not used to walking and his balance was out of practice.

This was an emotional scene. This man had just been healed. There had been no therapy. There were no tricks or strings attached. He healing had been complete and unexpected. And the fact that he had been a familiar sight in front of the Temple made it now all the more dramatic.

AN INCITEFUL SERMON

Once again, it is Peter who addresses the crowd, serving as the spokesman for the church. This is the second sermon we have seen him preach. It is not markedly different from the first.

A Profile of Two Sermons	
Acts 2	Acts 3
Men of Judea (2:14) Men of Israel (2:22)	Men of Israel (3:12)
“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God with miracles and wonders and signs” (2:22)	“Why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power we made him walk... the God of our fathers has glorified His servant Jesus” (3:12-13).
You nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (2:23)	You delivered up and disowned in the presence of Pilate... put to death the Prince of Life (3:13-15)
God raised Him (2:24,32)	God raise Him (3:15)
We are witnesses (2:32)	We are witnesses (3:15)
(Several prophecies quoted in verses 25-28 and 34-35)	God announced by all the prophets (3:18)
Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (2:38)	Repent and return that your sins may be wiped away (3:19)
The promises are for you and for your children and for all who are far off (2:39)	The covenant God made with your fathers... In your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed (3:25)

These are the only two sermons which we have of Peter’s. They are essentially the same

sermon. Peter had one basic message. It was a message about the coming and death and resurrection of Jesus and a warning of future judgment to follow. It was enough.

1. Peter's Disclaimer.

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? (Acts 3:12).

My old friend Kelly Smith suggests that some of those gathered were looking to take back some of their alms from the beggar.

Peter begins with a disclaimer. His disclaimer is, "We didn't do it!" Peter and John are not strong enough ("by our own power"). Peter and John are not spiritual enough ("by our own... piety"). The point of the miracle has nothing to do with Peter and John; it has everything to do with Jesus.

In chapter 1, we saw the disciples GAZING into the sky after Christ had ascended. Two angels appeared and asked why they were looking at the sky. Now we hear Peter asking, "Why are you GAZING at us?" There has been a change of roles for the disciples. The change was brought on by the coming of the power of God.

I might have been tempted to take some of the credit ("Yeah, me and the Lord did something big today!"). But Peter knew that it wasn't his power. Any power that he demonstrated came through an outside source. Peter wasn't able to turn it on and off at will. Neither was Paul. Years later, his friend Timothy would have stomach problems and all that Paul would do would be to give him advice on what to drink for it.

2. The Point of the Miracle - Jesus.

¹³ *"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.*

¹⁴ *"But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. (Acts 3:13-15).*

The traditional temple prayers offered at this time of the day would begin by addressing "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Peter uses this same formula to address those who have gathered.

Throughout Peter’s sermon, he contrasts the actions and attitudes of the Jews with those of the God of Israel. God has lifted up and exalted Jesus. The Jews has blasphemed and acted against Jesus.

God’s Actions on Behalf of Jesus	The Jews’ Actions against Jesus
God glorified His servant Jesus	The One whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate
When he had decided to release Him...	You disowned...
The Righteous one of Israel	You put to death...
...the Prince of Life, the One whom God raised from the dead.	Implication: Your actions are not God’s actions.

The point of this passage is that God’s attitude toward Jesus was one of support while the attitude of the Jews was one of enmity. By acting against Jesus, they had been acting against God.

3. The Foundation of Faith.

“And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.” (Acts 3:16).

At first glance, it looks as though this healing took place on the basis of the lame man’s faith. But this was not the case. The lame man hadn’t known anything about Jesus.

In the Greek text, the definite article appears before the word “faith.” This is not speaking of the lame man’s faith. It is speaking about THE FAITH. The reference to “the name” of Jesus is a reference to His authority. This miracle took place via the authority and power of Jesus.

4. The Call for Faith.

17 *“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just*

as your rulers did also.

¹⁸ *“But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (Acts 3:17-18).*

Do you remember the prayer of Jesus which He prayed while He was on the cross? It is Luke who records those words. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34). This does not mean that they did not sin. If they had not sinned, they would not have needed forgiveness. They sinned in ignorance, but they were willfully ignorant. They did not know because they did not want to know.

Unbelief is like that. Unbelievers generally do not believe because they do not want to believe. Romans 1:21-23 speaks of those who knew God, but *“did not honor Him as God”* and who *“exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”* 2 Peter 3:5 describes those who *“willfully forget”* (the Greek text renders this meaning).

5. An Invitation to Repent.

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21).

Peter calls for repentance. This was the same invitation he made in chapter 2.

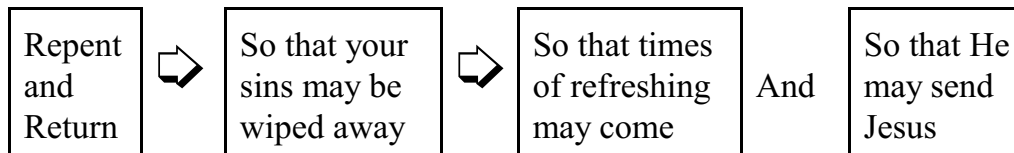
Acts 2:38	Acts 3:19
<i>Repent and be baptized</i>	<i>Repent and return</i>
<i>For the forgiveness of your sins</i>	<i>So that your sins may be wiped away</i>
<i>And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit</i>	<i>In order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that He may send Jesus.</i>

There are two possible Greek words for time. They are both used in this passage.

Καιρος	A point in time (Used in verse 19 - <i>that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord</i>)
Χρονος	An epoch or era (Used in verse 21 - <i>the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke</i>)

In Acts 17:30, Paul speaks of “times of ignorance” (χρονους της ἀγνοίας), referring to the era prior to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles.

There once was a time when to Gospel had not gone out to the nations. These were the times of ignorance. But now that the gospel has come, all the nations have the opportunity to enter into times of refreshing. There is coming a future day when we shall see a time of restoration. Notice the progression presented by Peter.



Do you see it? Peter sees the return of Christ as being one of the results of repentance. He says the same thing in his second epistle.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. (2 Peter 3:11-12).

Repentance will bring and hasten the times of refreshing. You may not agree with this, but it is obviously a part of Peter’s theology.

6. The Testimony of Moses and the Prophets.

²² “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you.

²³ “‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’”

²⁴ “And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. (Acts

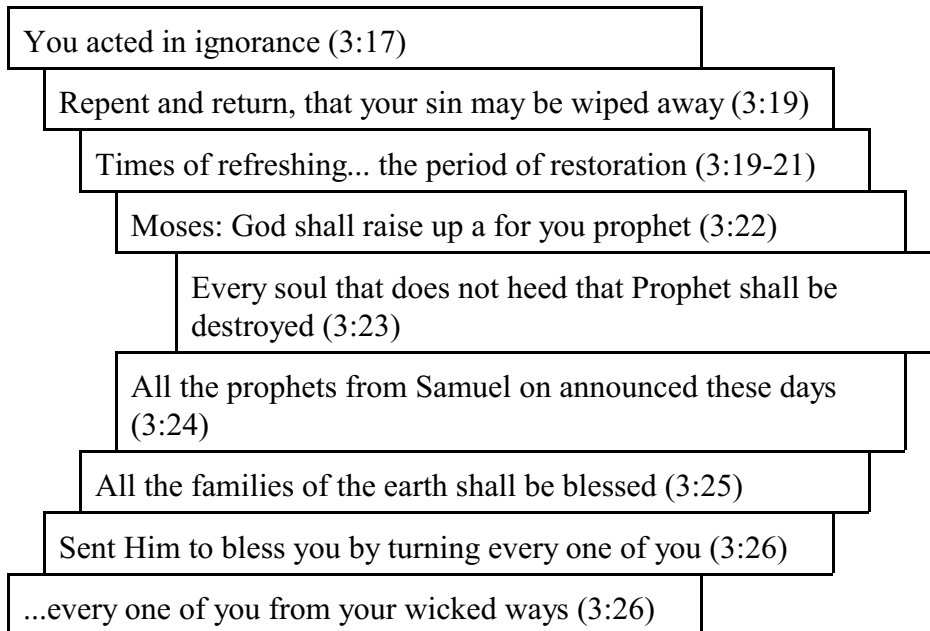
3:22-24).

Peter appeals to the testimony of Moses. Moses both the Lawgiver and the first of the prophets. He did it all. He delivered the Israelites from Egypt. He set forth the standards by which the Jews were to live. And he saw the Israelites through their sojourn in the wilderness. He was the greatest of the prophets. He not only delivered the words of God, he spoke with God face to face.

One of the promises of Moses had been that there would come another prophet with his kind of greatness. A prophet who would bring ultimate deliverance. A prophet who would establish the depth of God's law. A prophet who had truly seen God face to face.

Moses was not the only one to speak of the coming of the Messiah. All of the prophets foretold His coming. To reject Jesus meant rejecting the message of Moses and all of the prophets who came after Moses.

There is a chiasmic parallel which runs through Peter's sermon.



The central and pivotal point in this chiasm is a warning. The warning is that you must listen to the prophets, or else. And when God sends THE Prophet about whom all of the other prophets prophesied, then you had better listen to Him.

7. An Appeal to the Sons of the Prophets.

25 *“It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*
26 *“For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:25-26).*

If anyone should have heard the message of the prophets and believed, it should have been those who were the *“sons of the prophets and of the covenant.”* This is an indictment against the Jews. It is an indictment because they should have known better. It is an indictment because their rejecting of Jesus was in effect a breaking of the covenant. It was an indictment because they were to be a blessing to the earth and instead they were full of cursing.

The good news was that the blessing which was to go out to all the earth was first available to them. It was available to bring them to repentance. It was available to turn them away from wickedness.

<p>In verse 26, Peter says, <i>“For you FIRST, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless.”</i> The fact that he addressed them as “you FIRST” implies that there will come a second - a harvest of Gentiles.</p>
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So far, the only one who had been blessed that day was the lame man. And in this, he served as a type of Israel. He was lame. He was in a helpless state. He had been carried to the door of the house of the Lord, but did not enjoy the benefits of that which was within. To do that required faith in Jesus. This man had believed and had received a healing.

The same is true of us. We are helpless in our sins. Apart from a healing, we cannot enter into the presence of God. But this healing is available to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Turning to Jesus in faith brings a blessing. What is this blessing? It is to turn you away from your sin. Sin is not good for you. Sin kills.

It is not that God is some cosmic killjoy who wants to stop you from having fun. He is seeking your best.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that preaches that sin is good. The term “virgin” is used among some as a term of ridicule. The popular motto is, “If it feels good, then do it.” But sin leads ultimately to death. And God calls you to life.