

Text: Acts 4:1-31

Title: Healing of a Lame Man Gets Peter and John Arrested

Date/Location: Wednesday 8/9/2023 and 8/16/2023 (rev. from 4/1/2012)

I. The Narrative of Chapters 3–4

A. The miracle of healing, 3:1-11

A forty+ year old man with a humanly incurable disease is immediately healed and able to walk, having never walked before. He was carried everywhere! Just having the coordination to walk is a miracle itself—much less jumping up and down and praising God!

B. Peter’s preaching, 3:12-26

Peter connects the miracle to the gospel message and concludes with a call for repentance for forgiveness of sin. He proclaims that God sent Jesus to bless the people in turning them away from their sins. We spent a moment last time thinking about the supreme blessing of being turned away from our iniquities.

C. Opposition by the religious authorities, 4:1-4

Jail time. This is what happens when you combine religion and police authority into one group of people. Today, a similar thing happens but the religion is not first century Judaism. Instead, it is a religion of human creation—secular atheistic humanism. It holds to beliefs including communism and rituals like abortion and free drug use open immorality and many other things.

The leaders did not want other teachers influencing the *hoi polloi*, and particularly against their leadership. It’s totally natural. Why should we expect otherwise? It is when these types of people get into power with unfettered authority that it really gets problematic. It is similar for us.

Despite this, many hearing the preaching about Jesus believed because the weight of the truth could not be dismissed. The miracle was obvious; the sensibility of what Peter was saying was obvious. You may doubt today, but if YOU were one of those ones who cast your vote against Jesus, and you knew that Jesus existed, and you heard the rumors about him, and you saw His life, and what Pilate did, and how He died, you would probably whistle a different tune.

D. Defense before the religious authorities, 4:5-22

Peter rehashes his message from the previous afternoon. He points the council to Jesus, reviewing again Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

He aggressively confronts his questioners by saying that Jesus is the OT stone rejected by the builders (Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, Matt. 21:42). They are the ones who were rejecting God's salvation—and there is no salvation in any other. Anyone among us who rejects Jesus as the way is just like these Pharisees.

The authorities ask a very dumb question about "by what power or by what name?" They knew as indicated in verse 2. They knew these guys were associated with Jesus whom they had crucified just a couple months earlier.

Their question and actions of incarcerating the apostles gave Peter the opportunity to proclaim Christ. Peter emphasizes the name of Jesus, His death, resurrection, and salvation. Peter explains that Jesus is the cornerstone—the most important stone, the foundation, the centerpiece of Jewish religion. He is the stone which the "builders" – elders of Israel – rejected, but which they desperately needed to build their "house of faith."

Peter plainly states that Jesus is the only way of salvation. No other name, and certainly no other impersonal philosophy or knowledge or method can save a soul from sin.

The Jewish leaders were shocked at the demeanor of Peter and John. Those two were not in their alumni association, for which they had a great deal of pride. These two apostles were not religiously instructed by Gamaliel or whomever.

Also, the leaders could not argue about the transformation that had occurred in the man who had been unable to walk for 40 years. This level of clarity in transformation should be evident in salvation as well. If your walk with Christ is questionable, if your transformation is not clear, then there is a problem.

The leaders could not control the spread of the news about the man, nor of the gospel itself.

The apostles were compelled to speak the things they had witnessed. They could not knuckle under to the authorities where they were demanding disobedience to God. They were helped by the people because the weight of opinion in the crowd was that what happened was undeniable, and consequently if you troubled the human agents (Peter and John), you were doing wrong.

II. The Christians' Response to This Persecution, 4:23-31

A. Prayer for boldness in face of persecution, 4:23-31. They recognized that the persecution predicted in Psalm 2 and that a fulfillment had now occurred. The prophecy is rather general, and I do not think that it only refers to this time in history. The general pattern of the nations is that they rage against God... and this is one episode of that ongoing vanity. The believers want to minister in spite of that so they pray to that end. They recognize that the world truly is against Jesus—it is not just paranoia driving their thinking. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the world hates Jesus, and lies in the lap of the wicked one. Whether subtle or overt, it is real. But it is all under the sovereign control and limitation of God. He determined beforehand that Christ would suffer and then be glorified.

In the face of that situation, which could induce great fear into the believers, they did not cave to the fear. Instead, they asked for boldness to speak the word, and that more miracles would be done so they could have more opportunities like what Peter and John just had.

God kindly answered with a small physical manifestation and more ministry of the Holy Spirit to influence them to speak openly about Christ. We like to think we should speak openly, but do we actually do so?

Where is the Holy Spirit in this passage? Acts 4:8 and 31 record that these Christians were filled with the Spirit. That is available to us as well.

I take from this passage a critical need to follow the example of the early disciples in praying, recognizing the fulfillment of Scripture and the opposition that we will face, but also trusting in God's power through the gospel to bring people to faith in Jesus.

- B. In that they were meeting each other's needs, 4:32-37, this is a continuation of 2:44-45 and it is also connected to 5:1-16 since that passage covers an episode in the internal benevolence operation of the church. We will look at that next time.
- C. Bigger picture, after the persecution, the Christians continued doing what they had already been doing—likeminded worship and ministering to one another. There's an important sense in which,

although we are aware of what is going on around us, we kind of ignore it and just keep doing what God has called us to do. The news can be full of mayhem, the world full of hatred, and the authorities full of venom, but we just keep ministering to one another and toward those outside the church.

III. Application: Our Response

A. The miracle of healing, 3:1-11

The crowd was filled with wonder and amazement at what happened.

It is easy to read the account and treat it as if it is not a big deal. But it *is* a big deal. We should marvel and be amazed as well, like 3:10-11.

The idea of these words is to be astonished at an unusual event, to be so moved as to be beside oneself. Luke 4:36 and 5:9 mention things done by Jesus that caused amazement. Now the same continues with Jesus' disciples!

We also should think about Peter's example, that he did not have money, but he did have something else to offer. Now, such miracles do not happen today (do you have any contrary evidence?). The authenticating function of such miracles is not necessary since we have the entire Bible now with the message self-authenticated. It seems that when the Lord returns, such spectacular miracles of healing will start again at His hand (Isaiah 35).

However, we *do* have something of far more value than physical healing. As a point of our philosophy of ministry (how we think about doing ministry and how we prioritize ministry), we need to keep this in mind: we have the *gospel*. We in the true Christian church are the only ones that have the true gospel. Not just in this local church, of course...there are many thousands of us...but there are millions of unbelieving people who need what we have. This is why we do not focus on *what* we have monetarily or materially, but rather the *message* we have.

B. Peter's preaching, 3:12-26 includes an introduction connecting the miracle to the gospel and a conclusion that calls for repentance for forgiveness of sin. There is a lot of good stuff in Peter's message.

Peter deflects glory from himself to God. I've had people say in a kind of fawning (exaggerated flattery) way, "You're doing such a good thing as a pastor!" That is kind, but it is not me who is doing it ultimately. Anyone who thinks that I am sufficient to do this ministry on my own

power needs to redirect their thinking. You and I are not some great things. We are human beings, like all the rest of the human beings on this planet. Without Christ, we can do nothing.

Peter strongly contrasts God's treatment of Jesus (exalted) with the people's treatment of Him (denied, delivered, and kill).

The apostles placed their faith in Jesus and these kinds of things happened for them as a result. Without belief, no mighty work will happen (Matt 13:58).

We should have compassion toward those who are unbelievers because they are ignorant. They are culpably ignorant, but they are still ignorant.

We have a serious accountability to really listen to what Jesus teaches us. This is why we try to carry out what he said, to teach our neighbors to observe all things that He has commanded. If we do not, we fall under the condemnation of Deut. 18:19.

Peter proclaims that the Abrahamic blessing on the families of the earth has to do with turning everyone away from iniquities! This includes the Jews as well as the Gentiles. This lays the foundation for Paul later to teach based on the same truth in Galatians 3. The gospel was promised ahead of time, in obscure form to be sure, but God had in mind blessing the entire world through Abraham's greatest offspring, Jesus.

For me, it is a great blessing to be turned away from sin.

IV. The Focus on Jesus

These first Christian sermons which we read in Luke's book talk about sin and forgiveness and repentance (2:38, 3:19), but they focus even more upon the identity and activity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some examples:

- Jesus: attested by God through miraculous signs, 2:22 (in His earthly ministry), 4:30 (and also continuing after His ascension)
- Jesus: delivered up and crucified, 2:23
- Jesus: raised from the dead, 2:24
- Jesus: exalted at the right hand of God, 2:34-35
- Jesus: made Lord and Messiah, 2:36

- Jesus: glorified by God after being delivered and denied by the people, 3:13-14
- Jesus: the prince of life, killed and raised again, 3:15
- Jesus: the name by which miraculous healings in Acts were performed, 3:16, 4:10
- Jesus: the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, 3:18
- Jesus: coming again to restore all things, 3:20-21
- Jesus: the message of resurrection from the dead for all people, 4:2
- Jesus: the only one by whom someone can be saved from sin, 4:12
- Jesus: the focal point of opposition from Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews, 4:27

V. Other Characteristics of the Preaching in Acts

Besides the Christocentric focus, there are some other characteristics of the early Acts preaching which include:

- Chapter 2 – the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, followed by a call to repent.
- Chapter 3 – the source of miraculous power to heal, the sinful murder of Christ, followed by a call to repent.
- Chapter 3 - That faith in Christ provided astounding power to make a man well of his disease; Christ suffered in fulfillment of OT prophecy; that He is the ultimate prophet raised up from Israel (and consequently we must hear him, Mark 9:7). He was sent as a blessing to turn people away from their sin.
- Chapter 4 – the need to obey God rather than men who command against preaching in the Name.

Conclusion

I believe we should go about sharing the good news about Jesus without fear of what the authorities or society are going to do in response. If we are called on the carpet, give them the same testimony that Peter and John did. We have the privilege of sharing the message that blesses people by turning them away from sin.

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