

Acts 3:16

Acts 3:1-8, 16

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It was a day like any other day. His brothers had gotten him out of bed and got him dressed, and on their way to work they carried him to his usual spot at the temple gate.

It was a day like any other, the sky wasn't any bluer, the birds didn't sing any louder, the sun didn't shine any brighter, and yet before it was finished it would be unlike any other day in his life.

As he lay with his shriveled, twisted legs extended in front of him, he probably thought of all the other days he had lain in front of the temple gate.

He looked down at the useless limbs stretched out on the blanket in front of him. They were his, but they weren't even a part of him, he had never felt them, never moved them.

He had never ran as a boy, never walked as a man, and today was just a day, no better and no worse than all the other days that had made up the life of this poor crippled beggar.

But without his knowledge and without his consent, today would become a day he would never forget.

Today would take him from being a beggar destined for an obscure life and obscure death and propel him into immortality.

Who was he? We don't know. The scriptures reveal nothing about his life up to this day, and nothing about his life after this day.

But this ordinary day would be written about by a doctor and read by millions upon millions of people all over the world.

This story is found in Acts 3, where, on their way to the temple for prayer, Peter and John met and healed a man who we're told was lame from birth.

This was the first healing attributed to the early church. In fact, the healing was so miraculous it attracted a crowd.

So, Peter sees an opportunity to preach. His sermon has the same theme as the one he preached on the day of Pentecost: God sent his Son, you killed him, so say you're sorry.

At the end he offers up these words of Acts 3:16, *"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."*

What started out as a normal day, ended as a day that would never be forgotten.

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Acts 3:1-2, *"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 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."*

The first thing we discover is that this man had a problem, he was a cripple, a subject not open to discussion. It wasn't debatable, it wasn't abstract or iffy; it was definite. He was a man lame from birth.

It wasn't his fault that he was lame. Sometimes our misfortunes have only one person to blame and that's us.

When you smoke and develop lung cancer or abuse alcohol and get cirrhosis of the liver, so don't shake your fist at God crying *"How could you do this to me."* It's your own fault.

Now, there are times when others are responsible. For instance, children who are born to people who smoke, or drink, or take drugs during their pregnancy are more apt to have problems than other children.

Sometimes there's physical abuse, or an accident will happen for which someone else is to blame. But this man was born a cripple; he couldn't walk.

As far as we know, it wasn't this man's fault, and as far as we know, it wasn't the fault of anyone else.

In today's climate, where everything has to be said in the politically correct way we would say that he was "physically disadvantaged" or "physically challenged."

Now here's a shocker: We all have problems. Sometimes there are those in our lives who try to minimize what we're going through by telling us just to suck it up.

Robert Fulghum, who wrote *"All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten,"* minimizes our problems with these words, *"If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire, then you got a problem. Everything else is an inconvenience."*

Others would remind us that problems are simply learning opportunities. Self-help author Anthony Robbins writes, *"Every problem is a gift - without problems we wouldn't grow."*

Lee Iacocca said, *"We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems."*

But, when your problem is staring you in the face, it doesn't seem like an inconvenience, an opportunity or a gift, sometimes it just seems insurmountable.

It may or may not be a physical problem. Maybe it's an emotional problem, or a relational problem, or maybe it's a financial problem when there's more month than there is paycheck.

We all have problems, and just because they aren't displayed outside the temple gate doesn't make them any less real.

In most cases our problems are as individual as we are, but there's a problem that we all share. We're all born with a spiritual problem; we're born with a streak of rebellion that leads us far from God.

That is why Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

None of us are born worthy to enter into the presence of God. We're born with a desire to sin, with a streak of rebellion. We try to achieve goodness, but we can't attain it on our own.

Every person on this planet has sought to justify themselves by devising some means to appease their god or gods.

Isaiah 64:6 tells us, *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."* That's a problem.

In themselves our righteous acts are really neat. They're wonderful, beautiful, marvelous things. And, if we compare them to the works of others, they may look like the finest of linens.

Yet when we hold them up to the righteousness of God, they're just dirty pieces of cloth. They can't compare.

And that's not just our righteousness, it's Billy Graham's, Mother Theresa's, John Wesley's and every other person who ever lived.

We aren't spiritually whole; we're spiritually crippled. Or to be politically correct we are "sin disadvantaged" or "righteous challenged."

But, as far as we know, it wasn't this man's fault that he was a cripple, nor was it the fault of anyone else.

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The next thing we discover is that this man thought he knew what he needed.

Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple.

This man didn't fool himself, he knew he was lame. He'd come to grips with that a long time ago. It was a rough time to be handicapped. There was no Social Security or Medicare.

It was a time and age when physical prowess and the quest for perfection abounded. The Romans had their gladiatorial contests and the Greeks had their Olympic games.

There was no sympathy and no place for those who weren't as perfect as they should be. Not every age or culture takes care of the less fortunate as today in our western society.

Think about it, only in the United States do we take those who are too old to work and unable to make a meaningful contribution to society, and elect them to congress or the presidency.

This man knew that he had limited potential; he knew that all the dreams, hopes and aspirations in the world couldn't make his dead legs function. He had accepted his fate.

If he was going to survive it would be by begging, and he sought out one of the most profitable spots, the main door to the temple.

Why was this a profitable spot? Devout Jews came here at 9 am, noon and 3 pm. He was trying to make those coming to worship God feel guilty, take pity on him and give him some money.

Think about it. Just like us, he thought he knew what he needed, but until we're ready to admit to the fact that we need Jesus, He can't help us.

It's like people who go to a hospital. They go for one of two reasons, 1) to get better, or 2) to ease their suffering. Other than that, there's no reason to be in a hospital.

The food might not be bad, but it isn't great. The beds aren't comfortable, and the company is depressing.

Though, if you're sick, it's an ideal place. If you're not sick you don't need a doctor, and if you're not lost then you don't need to be found.

Mark 2:17 says, *"On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

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As Peter and John were about to enter the gate, the beggar saw them and probably called out to attract their attention.

The beggar was looking for a handout, and he thought that was what he was going to get when they stopped. But listen to what happened.

Acts 3:3-6, *"When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!'"*

So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 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."

Think about it. What do you do when you see someone on the street panhandling or you go to the store and someone's standing there with a box for a teen sport and you have no change?

You look the other way, don't you? When the beggar asked for alms, Peter didn't look the other way, he said, *"Look at us."* Why did Peter have to tell him to look at them?

This man probably had learned to just stare ahead and ask for alms from anyone who passed by him. He never expected anything, but was pleased when someone found pity on him and gave some money.

Peter wanted this man's undivided attention, as he had a gift for him. This is why, when we approach God in prayer, God wants our undivided attention. We must approach Him expecting an answer.

Matthew 7:7-10, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?"

When we come to God in prayer, and ask that our sins be forgiven, we expect Him to forgive them. Not hope they'll be forgiven but expect they will be forgiven.

Christ will forgive us, save us and give us eternal life, but we have to ask. We need to approach Him. Like the beggar, he never would've gotten anywhere if he hadn't asked.

Christ has to be approached with a positive attitude. The beggar didn't say, *"You probably don't want to give me anything, do you?"*

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But, put yourself in this lame man's spot. Every day of his adult life he'd been carried to this spot to beg.

Rain or shine, warm weather or cold. He probably had days when he collected next to nothing and other days when he tripled his usual take.

He probably had taken physical and verbal abuse, ridiculed and slandered but never had he heard anything like this.

He'd asked for a crumb and been offered a banquet; he'd asked for a pittance and been offered his very life. How should he react, what thoughts coursed through his head?

Had he heard of Peter, John, or Jesus of Nazareth? We'll probably never know, but this we do know, he believed Peter.

Acts 3:7, "Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong."

Did you catch that? *"Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up."* Peter didn't grab him under his arms and lift him up; he took him by the hand and helped him up.

Peter assisted the beggar to his feet; he helped him get up. That means the man must have helped as well. He put his weight on his legs and felt the strength course down his thighs.

As his muscles began to swell, and tingle with the unfamiliar tensions and movement he realized that he was doing the impossible, he was standing by himself.

Slowly the realization dawned on him, this wasn't a practical joke. These men undeniably had more to offer than silver and gold.

They had given him what nature had deprived him of; they had given him his legs.

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One minute he was half a man, the next minute whole. One minute he was crippled, the next minute healed.

Just as his handicap had been beyond dispute so was his healing. Not even the Sanhedrin and High Priest could doubt or disbelieve what they had witnessed.

Here was a man who had been crippled by a cruel quirk of nature, and yet now he was whole, just as if his handicap had never been.

The legs that had never moved now responded to every whim, the feet that had never felt now sensed the pebbles and dust that lay beneath them.

The same with us, although we may have a spiritual handicap, we can be made whole.

David committed adultery, murder and treason and yet in Psalms 51:7 David writes, *“Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”*

Paul says, concerning sin, in Romans 6:23, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

When we ask for forgiveness, our being is touched and we're made every bit as whole and clean as Adam was before the fall. It doesn't matter what the sin, Jesus is able to make us whiter than snow.

The violent murderer becomes as innocent as a new born babe. The foulest prostitute becomes as pure as a virgin.

That's what happens when Jesus comes into your life, Paul says it best in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"*

Every sin, evil thought, word, or deed; every hurt and scorn, shall be gone. David said it best in Psalm 103:12, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

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Conclusion

Acts 3:8, *"He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."*

I like this. Nobody had to tell him to go to the temple. Nobody told him he should thank God, but he knew he had to.

His first act was one of praise and thanksgiving. He was on fire and he wanted to share it with everyone he met.

He didn't care if offended them; he didn't wonder if it would drive them away; he wanted to tell them what happened in the name of Jesus.

I can just hear him now, *"Excuse me sir, I don't know you but a few minutes ago I was a cripple, couldn't walk, couldn't even move my toes, I just laid there on the street."*

And do you know what? A man came up and said, 'silver and gold have I none but what I have I give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk,' and guess what, I can walk."

If he had of been like some Christians, his first reaction would've been, *"Oh no, now I'll have to buy shoes or, now I'll have to find a job."*

It might not hurt if we got a little more excited about our faith, after all if you were drowning and someone threw you a rope, you'd get excited.

If you had cancer and someone developed a cure, you'd get excited. If by some slim chance the Cowboys won the Super Bowl, you'd get excited.

Perhaps in the midst of our problems we need to pray as David did in Psalm 51:8, *"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice."*