

Acts 3:1-10

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Date: 16 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, hi. My name's Andrew. If you've not met, I'm one of the leaders here in Harvest Church, and it's great to be together this morning. What a lovely sense of God meeting with us.

And I trust we're going to continue to know that as we're in his word, and then as we break bread together in a little while's time. We're in a series as a church looking at the book of Acts, and we've used this phrase, devoted, devoted to God, devoted to each other, devoted to mission.

As a way of describing some of the aspects of the book of Acts, it's not meant to be comprehensive, but it is there to stir us and provoke us to say, Yeah, God, how can I grow in my devotion to you, Lord? How can I grow in my devotion to loving others?

That is the church, first and foremost, but also then how can I grow in my love for those that you put around me, God, which is mission. And it's stepping out to see God's kingdom come in other people's lives, to see his kingdom come through how we live and through how we interact with people.

And so that's the series we're in. If you're new to us, you can catch up online. There are recordings of all the different parts we've been through so far. But we're today going to look into Acts chapter 3.

[1 : 16] If you have your Bible, you may want to turn to it, but the words will also come up on the screen. And the story is that of the healing of a crippled beggar.

And so I'm going to read it to us. One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at 3 in the afternoon. Just to say, they would have done that lots of times. Okay, this was not a unique moment, but it was something they probably did every day and maybe even multiple times in a day.

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.

Again, it happened every day. This is a normal day. And when he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. One imagines he probably did that quite a lot.

He was a beggar. He could not survive without the gifts of people to enable him because he couldn't work because he wasn't well enough to work. He was crippled. Peter looked straight at him, as did John.

[2 : 26] And then Peter said to him, look at us. Now, I guess if you're a beggar and you're hoping to receive some alms, to receive some money, if somebody says, look at us, you probably would because you're expectant that you're going to receive something.

And so the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. And then Peter utters these words. He says, silver or gold I do not have. But what I do have, I give to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.

And then taking him by the right hand, it's as though he reached down here and grabbed this person and pulled him up. Sorry, Robert didn't warn you I was going to do that, did I? He helped him up.

And as he helped him up, instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

[3 : 31] Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. Wow, what a scene that would have been. Everybody in the temple courts, because he sat at the entrance to the temple, everybody in the temple courts would have known who he was and would be going, what on earth has happened?

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized 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 has happened to him.

And Father, as we consider your word, we ask, come and speak to us. Capture our hearts with your word and through your word. And let it yield great fruit in our lives, we ask.

In Jesus' most precious name. Amen. Amen. There's two things I'd like to draw out of this passage. Keeping it quite simple today because I'm keen that we have time to pause and enjoy God's provision of communion, of celebrating that communion moment.

And so two things. The first one's this. Just to say, when you get asked a question by somebody, the question asked may not be the real need. Here we had a beggar asking a question, looking for something.

[4 : 58] And somehow Peter and John realized that actually they've got something very different to give him. And I think too often in life we can be taken up by the immediate question in front of us, give us some money, and forget that actually we have a different need which we can answer.

You see, for the beggar, the need he had actually was to be well so that he could earn. He didn't actually need the money if he was well.

And sometimes God wants to meet with people right at their heart need, not at just what's staring us in the face. And so I want to encourage us, when we do life each day, why not say, God, help me to see what you're doing.

It's a great prayer to pray at the beginning of the day. Help me, Lord, to see what you're doing today. Help me to see those situations you put me in from your perspective, not mine.

I wonder whether that's what was going on here with Peter and John. Even though they've walked past this guy many, many times, for some reason they knew that this day was the day, and they dived in.

[6 : 13] They dived in. Right, okay, silver and gold have I got none. But what I have got, the blessing of God, be healed. I mean, how much more important is that for this man?

Let's look with God's eyes at the situation. Let's not get caught up with the obvious need and see the deep down spiritual need. This person, ultimately, they needed healing, and they needed to come to God.

And both of those things happened to this beggar. And then we can ask, God, what do you want to do? I wonder whether Peter and John had even talked about this man before.

I wish we could do something for him. He's a beggar. He's sick. I wonder if they'd been praying before. I wonder, God, do you want to do something? They'd seen the obvious need and had spent time going and thinking and praying.

And God, what do you want to do? Was it just a spur of the moment thing? Was it something planned? We don't know. But I think too often we can see the obvious need day by day and not pause to say, Lord, what do you want to do in this situation?

[7 : 26] How can we respond? How can we bring something of your kingdom to bear in this situation? And so that's the first thing I really want to talk about here.

God, give us eyes to see as you see. Help us to have courage, yes, and faith, yes, to step out into what you've called us to. Now, within that, this situation was about healing.

And I do just want to briefly talk about healing because God loves to heal. In fact, I reckon, let's try this for an experiment. If you have known God sovereignly touching your life at a point in time, any point in time in all the years you've lived, where he has healed you from something, can I ask you to be really brave and put your hand up, please?

Just have a look around. You may need to even turn around in your seat, shock horror, and look at the people behind you. I reckon that is a good third of the room, maybe two-fifths, maybe 50%. Isn't that wonderful? Because I think too often we think God doesn't heal. We're not sure he's going to heal. But God is a God who loves to heal. Now, you may say, well, yeah, but sometimes he doesn't.

[8 : 40] No, well, that's because he's God and we're not. He gets to choose. But does that mean we don't pray for healing? Sometimes we need to press through, a bit like Peter did here, and actually grab his hand and lift him up.

There was an action required, not just saying, silver and gold have none, but be healed in Jesus' name. There was an action which was required at the same time, calling the person out of their sickness into health.

Now, we have to be in tune with God to know when to do that. We need to assault him. But can I encourage us? God heals.

It's in the scriptures. Thank you, Anthony, by the way, for that amen. It's in the scriptures. He heals. He heals. He sets people free from all sorts of sicknesses and illnesses.

Even at our church recently, a few weeks ago, we prayed for Ron. Don't you remember Ron who'd got the brain tumour, was rushed up into Tooting Hospital, which is a neural hospital in London. And we prayed for him.

[9 : 42] He is now home. He is recovering. And the doctors are saying it will take quite some time to recover. It may take as long as a year for him to fully regain all functions that he lost during that tumour.

But they're saying, you know, that's fine. It's sorted now. Isn't that good? You may say, well, yeah, that's medical science, isn't it? Who gave medical science? God can heal in all sorts of different ways.

Sometimes he heals directly. Sometimes he allows man to intervene in man's life to bring healing. Let's celebrate when people get made well. Sometimes the answer is not yet.

But the key thing is allowing God to be the decider. And we can only allow him to be the decider if we, first of all, come to him and say, hey, Lord, what do you want to do here?

We want to bring this person to you. We want to ask for their healing. If we don't bother, then there's no decision. Friends, we have a God who heals.

[10 : 47] A God who loves to demonstrate that his goodness, his grace, his mercy. And sometimes he does that in very public ways, where people get healed like in this story.

And as a result of that, people go, wow, what happened there? Because they go, I knew that, I knew that beggar. He's the one who's out at the gate. And now look at him.

What on earth happened? And he's praising God. We don't know whether he got saved at that moment or whatever happened, but when somebody's praising God, it tends to suggest their life's been radically changed.

Do you believe God heals today? Yeah? Great.

Because in about 10 minutes' time, we're going to pray for God to come and bring his healing power in our lives. And I want to encourage us to allow a sense of faith, hope, expectation grow as we are in his word this morning.

[11 : 45] As we're reading this story, we're going to be celebrating communion together and we're going to be praying for people to be healed. And we're going to be looking for God to bring healing to some. Can I also say, though, when we reach out in faith to see somebody, to pray for somebody to be healed, let's do it in such a way that we leave the person feeling loved and blessed and drawn closer to God, regardless of the result.

We trust in the sovereignty of God, but we take steps of faith towards him. And so we can trust God to make the right decision whether it heals there and then or not.

Sometimes there's other factors involved and there's a bit of a journey involved in somebody's healing. Sometimes it requires a faith response. I'm not sure whether you can call this a faith response being pulled onto your feet, but it was a sort of faith response, certainly a faith response by Peter.

But let's make sure that when we pray for somebody for healing, they are blessed because they encounter Jesus afresh.

Personally, whenever I pray for, or most of the time when I pray for somebody for healing, I also pray that God would bless them with his peace, with his love, with his grace, with his mercy, because I want them to walk away from that time, whether healed or not, because we can trust God to do that, I want them to walk away from that time going, yeah, I've met with God.

[13 : 16] Because that's the most important bit. If I meet with God and I'm not healed, that's okay, because I still know God loves me and he cares for me. But at the same time, let's not let that stop us from looking for people to be healed.

Earlier, I asked, have you been healed? Good show of hands. I want to ask another question now. In the last six months, have you prayed for somebody to be healed?

Hey, look at that. Come on, church. Wonderful. Wonderful. Great. You can put your hands down. Why am I asking that? Because I think sometimes we have to remind ourselves to stir faith, to exercise faith, to look to God.

Let's go on to the second point. Peter was prepared. He was ready. Peter and John, actually. They were ready to step out with courage and faith.

Courage and faith. Courage, we talk about that as being one of our culture words as a church. It's stepping out in faith even where fear exists.

[14 : 35] Courage isn't going, oh, I'm certain, therefore I can do it. No. Courage is exercised in the face of fear. It's saying, I choose to step out.

I choose to believe. I choose to reach out in the love of God. And of course, you know, it's so easy to have things which stop us. Things such as we don't see or spot the opportunity, perhaps because we're too busy.

Or perhaps because they've been there all this time and nothing's happened before, so why should it happen today? Can I encourage us if we start the day saying, Lord, what do you want to do today through me in my life?

And even ask that during the day, we may well see different things. And we may well find that we have opportunity to respond in ways which we haven't done before. We don't see the opportunity. Beginning of the day, Lord, help me to see and to respond to what you're doing. It's a dangerous prayer. It's a great prayer. What else can stop us from stepping out in faith?

[15 : 40] Well, fear. Fear's the big one, isn't it? It tries to trap us and say, oh, what happens if it doesn't work? What happens if the crowd then jeer you because you said to them, be healed in Jesus' name and they're not healed?

And fear of man, fear of circumstances, fear of them, whoever they are, and what their response will be, even fear of the person you step out to reach out to love to, to pray for healing.

That can stop us. Let's be real, it can. Or it can be a fear, I don't know whether God wants to do this or not, an uncertainty, fear, but there's a stirring in your heart of faith, I think I should, but I don't know, an uncertainty.

It's where we need to remind ourselves ultimately that it's God's work and our obedience, not our work and his obedience.

I just want to say that again. Signs and wonders, healing included, are God's work and our obedience, not our work and God's obedience.

[16 : 48] So I want you to think that one through for a moment. I think sometimes we can get in that place where we think, well I've just got to bully God into it. We can't.

God is God. He's almighty God. He is the great I am. We can't push God into anything. But we can be obedient to what he's called us to do. And we gaze on him as we consider him.

We find grace to be able to go, oh wow, I know God heals. I know God heals because I've seen it in my life, my personal life. I've seen it in the lives of, I don't know, 100 people in this church who put their hands up just now.

I know he heals. His word tells me he heals. Now am I going to be obedient to step out in faith? Am I going to step out and encourage and go for it and say, yeah, hey, can I pray for you?

Can I pray for you for healing for that situation? Faith frees us and enables us to ask the question, I wonder what God will do here.

[17 : 51] I wonder what God's wanting to do here. I'm wondering what God is about in this moment that I'm in. Friends, we're filled with God's spirit who can direct us, who can guide us, who can empower us, who can help us step out in faith.

But fundamentally, the choice to step out in faith is yours, mine. And so, we need to gaze upon our Father.

That's why starting the day with, Lord, what do you want to do today? I'm going to fix my eyes on you first and foremost. What do you want to do today? Can I be involved, please? Great way to start the day.

Okay. Can I say this? For some of us, we may feel we've blown it.

Where you know God called you to something and you didn't do it. And now you're beating yourself up about it, even though it was years ago. God's not.

[19 : 03] Where you've repented of, if it was real disobedience before God, that needs repentance. Where you've repented of it, God's not holding it against you at all. He wants to take you on a journey again. He wants to take each one of us on a journey again.

A journey of faith. A journey of courage. A journey of reaching out to see his kingdom come in other people's lives. And I believe for some today there is a moment where we just need to say, God, I'll trust you again.

I'll trust you again and I'll go again and I'm not going to get discouraged or disheartened on whatever the response is. I'm just going to be obedient to what you've called us to do.

To see his kingdom come, his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So, two simple yet life-changing areas for seeing more of God's kingdom come.

God, give me eyes to see. That's the first one. God, give me eyes to see what you're doing and enable me to not be rushing through life. Help me to take those steps and the linked one to that is God give me courage and faith to respond.

[20 : 24] Simples. We're going to come into communion in just a couple of minutes. Before we do so, when we have communion, when we share breaking of bread together, we remind ourselves of the enormity of all Jesus did on the cross and that he was all sufficient.

That all sin and shame got dealt with at the cross. That means if you're carrying sin today which you haven't resolved with him, there is an opportunity now to resolve that with God today.

And in fact, scripture encourages us to make sure that we've checked our hearts and our minds first before we come to take bread and wine. And so, in the light of what we've just been looking at in this passage, I want to encourage us just to pause for a moment.

And if perhaps you find the Spirit stirring something in you, a memory where you think, oh yeah, I've got that wrong and I've held out on God since then or I've been disobedient, hey, come, let's remind ourselves we have a God of grace and love that we can come to.

A God where Jesus is all sufficient to allow us to be redeemed from all sin, no restrictions, all shame. And so, let's just now pause and make sure we are in that right place with God.

[21 : 47] And let's come and ask Him again to remind us of His grace and love and mercy that Jesus is sufficient for us in everything and we can put our faith in Him.

So, I'm going to be quiet for a couple of moments and then I'll lead us further into communion.

Thank you. Thank you. As we examine our hearts before you, Lord, and our lives, we want to give ourselves afresh to you today.

So, be Lord of all, of everything. Help us to surrender. Surrender our sin, our shame, those things we've held on to which perhaps have defined us and receive your forgiveness as we confess them to you now.

Come, cleanse us afresh. Wash us whiter so that we be white, whiter than snow. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, sin and shame dealt with forever.

we love you, Lord.

[24 : 11] Lord, we worship you with all of our lives. We want to worship you. Amen.

Amen. If we could have the band back, please, because you're going to, I think, help us to come into that place of communion and we're going to have a song before we break bread together.

But I'd like us to do it slightly differently perhaps to how we normally do it. So, shock, horror, apologies if this is not in your comfort zone. Normally what we do is we just say, well, we're now going to have a time where we come forward and break bread together.

And rather than making it one point in time, I'd like to invite you actually, even right from this moment, if you're ready to come and break bread together, head forward.

And once you've broken bread and taken the wine in memory of what Jesus did on the cross, by the way, sorry, it's fruit juice not wine in case you're concerned about that, and there is gluten-free options on every table.

[25 : 27] Must get those bits in. I'd like to encourage you to wait at the table. And if you then want healing, ask someone to pray for you.

Perhaps it's somebody you already know. Maybe it's not. If you're happy to pray for somebody for healing, hang around as well. And as we worship God, as we delight ourselves in God, as we give ourselves to God, and celebrate the sufficiency of the cross, let's look for God to come and encounter us.

And as you pray for people to be healed, let's also pray God's richest blessing on them, that they know the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, that he would be a delight to them in the same time that each and every person there who gets prayed for knows they receive something from God.

If you particularly are longing for healing and you feel you would love an elder to anoint you with oil, that's fine. I have oil here on the lectern and Rob and I and Sean I hope as well, if you don't mind getting involved as well, I haven't even mentioned it to Rob.

Guys, if you wouldn't mind, we'll be at the front here and we'll be happy to pray and anoint you with oil as encouraged in the book of James. If you're sick, call on the elders of the church, ask them to anoint you with oil and we will do that too.

[26 : 43] Is that okay? Christine, bam, please help us, let's stand together. We're going to sing amazing love, laying down your glory, you endured the cross.

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