

Acts 3 - Williams

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[0:00] Well, the honeymoon is over. And I'm not saying that just because the printer messed up our worship folder.! Or because Daniel Bear is wandering around, sneaking, sneaking around.

! Not sure why, but something's wrong. No, the honeymoon is over. I'm offering to you as a description of what is happening in the life of the early church at this point in Acts chapter 3. Let me give us a little context, a little reminder to help us understand that or think about that idea. In the first two chapters of Acts, we have seen Jesus has risen from the dead. He has ascended into heaven. He instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit would come. That Spirit does come on Pentecost, what we call Pentecost Sunday. This powerful manifestation of flames of fire and the Spirit filling the believers. They speak in tongues. This generates incredible excitement and energy in the church.

[1:12] 3,000 are added to their number. And this group of early Christians in Jerusalem experience wonderful joy in community.

John pointed this out for us last Sunday. They love being together. They love eating meals together. Worshiping in the temple together. They're very generous, taking care of one another.

And so this is the honeymoon period of the early church. What happens now in chapter 3, Luke, the author of this book of Acts, turns the page.

And he begins to build tension into the story. And the way he does that is he gives us this miracle story of this lame beggar who is healed.

And then he records a sermon that Peter preaches. Very powerful and confrontational sermon, as we'll see. And this miracle and this sermon really get the attention of the Jewish leaders, the leaders of the temple.

[2:20] And they begin to sharpen an attack against this early Christian church. So tension and trouble is now coming into the story.

That's what's happening. We're going to see more of this next week and really the next few weeks. It's trouble from outside, from these leaders who are opposing this early movement, but then also trouble from inside.

We start to see deception and corruption within this church. And so the honeymoon is over. That's what I mean by that. This morning we'll focus on Acts chapter 3.

Please keep your Bibles open. Let me give you the outline of the sermon. We will look at what I'm calling the sensational miracle. This healing, verses 1 to 10.

Then I thought we could take an intermission, an intermission in our sermon. And I want to just give some teaching on speeches in the book of Acts. This feature of the book of Acts.

[3:24] There's a lot of speeches. We'll look at that as an intermission of sorts. And then finally we'll look closely at this sermon that Peter preaches. And that's verses 11 to 26.

So let's start by just looking at this miracle. Verse 1 of chapter 3. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

I actually want to stop right there and point out something that's a little easy to miss. Peter and John are the disciples who were probably closest to Jesus.

Probably spent the most time with Jesus. They're together. They're walking into this temple. The ninth hour is three in the afternoon. It's the time of the afternoon sacrifice and prayer.

And what Peter and John are doing is exactly what pious and observant Jews would do. And I just want to point that out.

[4:22] I want you to notice that. That whatever it was Peter and John believed about Jesus and what Jesus had taught and what Jesus had taught them to do or not do.

They clearly don't seem to think that Jesus tells them to stop going to the temple or stop worshiping God in the temple.

And so they are doing what faithful observant Jews do. This becomes real important in the sermon. We'll look at that.

I just want you to notice that. They walk to the temple and verse 2, And a man lame from birth was being carried whom they had laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the beautiful gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.

So a man lame from birth. He's never walked. We find out in the next chapter he's more than 40 years old. Apparently his friends carry him to this gate, the beautiful gate.

[5 : 27] And he's there regularly such that people see him. And he becomes sort of a fixture at this place. Have you ever been around beggars?

Even here in Wheaton, actually, there are a couple of intersections, major intersections, where regularly certain people, And I can think of a couple of people.

I see them and I say, Oh, yeah, that's the guy who stands at Geneva and Main Street or whatever, you know. And so this beggar has become quite associated with the beautiful gate and well-known. I'll take a little minute on some architecture, okay? Architecture tour. The Jewish historian Josephus actually describes the temple in great detail.

The temple in Jerusalem at this time is the city center. It's town hall, the common square. There are nine different entrances to the temple complex.

[6 : 41] And Josephus spends a good bit of time describing one that he calls the beautiful gate. Josephus says, This gate is over 40 feet tall. There's two wooden slabs.

The wooden slabs are overlaid with bronze metal such that it glistens in the sun. Beautiful metal work. It takes 20 men every morning to open this gate and 20 men in the evening to close the gate. Every day, huge effort to open and close the beautiful gate. It's a stunning entrance to the temple. It's one of the most frequented or most used entrances.

And so this beggar is sitting in the high-profile place by the beautiful gate. And he becomes well-known for being there.

And so as Peter and John walk up to him, he reaches out his hand and he asks for alms, for money. And Peter comes to him. Verse 6. And Peter says, I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you.

[7 : 49] In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and raised him up. And immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

And leaping up, he stood and began to walk and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. In two verses, it says walking four times. Like, get the point here.

This guy jumped up and started walking and leaping. Walking and leaping. I want to think about that with you a little bit.

Walking and leaping. A 40-year-old who had never, ever done that. I'm going to play a little game. Okay, here's a little game.

Have you ever is the game, okay? Have you ever been around a toddler as the toddler learns how to walk?

[8 : 47] Oh yeah, got a hand raised, good. And it's fun, the toddler falls a lot. I like that, it's fun. It's fun to watch kids fall over. No, I'm kidding. Toddlers fall a lot when they start to walk.

Have you ever helped a child learn how to ride a bicycle? Or do you remember yourself learning how to ride a bicycle? Maybe you were one of those geniuses who just, first time, you know, maybe not.

It's complex, okay? Have you ever been around an adult stroke victim who, even though they have the bone density and the muscle mass and the ability to walk in an instant, but the stroke loses that ability to walk because walking actually requires very complex brain activity.

So think about those three, a toddler, a child learning how to ride a bicycle, and an adult stroke victim. It gives us some insight into how complex walking and leaping is.

And this happens in an instant. And it is a miracle of bone and muscle and brain in a high-profile place with a kind of a high-profile individual, this man who is well-known.

[10 : 18] And so this creates a sensation in this temple area. Peter and John walk in.

This man is leaping and praising God loudly. And everyone recognizes him. Verse 10. They recognize him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple, asking for alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

And while he clung to Peter and John, verse 11, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. And when Peter saw it, he addressed the people.

Okay, so that's the scene. Everyone crowds around them. And Peter takes the opportunity to give a speech.

So that's the miracle. Now it's our intermission. We're already at intermission. Hmm. You may not get up and leave. The intermission, I want to make some comments about speeches in the book of Acts.

[11:29] Before we look closely at this speech that Peter gives, here's just some teaching on speeches in the book of Acts. One third of the book of Acts is a record of speeches.

Acts is normally classified as historical narrative. So it tells story, history stories, we might say. But in a very deliberate way throughout the book, an event will happen, and then a significant character will give up and will stand up and will give a speech.

And it's very deliberate. It's a real feature of the literature of the book. One third of the book is a record of these speeches. Depending on how you classify, there's a lot of debate about this.

There's either 24, somewhere between 24 and 36 different speeches in the book of Acts. There's debate about what is and is not a speech. The Apostle Paul gives nine to ten of the speeches.

The Apostle Peter gives about eight or nine of the speeches. Stephen, we heard a reading of that this morning. Stephen, one of the original deacons, gives one speech. It's the longest speech in the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 7.

[12:41] So these speeches are given by major characters, early Christian leaders. Most of them are leaders in this early Christian church. And I want to suggest that these speeches are compact summaries of what was said.

They are not a word-for-word transcription. Most scholars think that's right, in part because most of the speeches, if you read them or read them out loud, they take two to three minutes, most of the speeches.

Stephen's, the longest speech, takes about eight or nine minutes. And most scholars say, well, it's, if you're in the Greco-Roman world and you're going to stand up and give a speech, you're going to hold forth for longer than two minutes.

It might just be preachers, this is an aside, it might be preachers advancing this idea, I don't know, preachers might say, well, of course, the speeches were much longer, certainly would be an hour, I don't know. But it seems plausible, right?

These speeches are very short, they're very compact, they seem to be condensed descriptions and records of what was said.

[13:52] But here's the key about the speeches, it's in the speeches that the author of Acts does theology. So the theology of the book of Acts is transmitted through these speeches.

So as you're reading, you come to a speech, you might say, well, this is long and boring, but we need to pay careful attention to these speeches because this is what Luke, the writer, this is how he's transmitting the theology, the doctrine, the teaching.

So Peter stands up now, back to our scene in the temple, the energetic beggar is right beside him and Peter says, all right, and so this is what he's doing. He's going to give a speech.

So now let's look closely at Peter's sermon. Here's what I've done. I have identified seven things in this sermon that I think are important for us to notice.

And I want to suggest to you that the author wants us to see at least these seven things, to notice what Peter is saying and doing, but the author is giving us these things in order for us to say and do the same kinds of things when we preach sermons, but also when we bear witness to Jesus Christ.

[15:22] So let's notice what Peter does and says, but I want us to be challenged, certainly as preachers and teachers to be challenged to do similar things, but I want every one of us to be challenged in our proclamation of the gospel, in our sharing of the gospel, to do and say similar things to this, okay, that we'll see.

I believe this is one of the points or maybe a main point of these sermons and these speeches.

Okay, so here we go.

Seven features of Peter's sermon. Number one, the sermon is open and public. Look at verse 11.

While he, the beggar, clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. The portico, Solomon's portico. In this temple in Jerusalem, the largest, what we might call the outer ring of the temple is called the court of the Gentiles. And Solomon's portico or Solomon's colonnade is on the east side of this large open court. I think it's important for us to realize this is the most publicly accessible and open place in the temple because when you went further into the center of the temple, well, Gentiles couldn't go in any further than this court of the Gentiles.

[17 : 03] And then you'd get to a circle where women couldn't go any further, only pious and ritually pure Jewish men could go. And so they're out in Solomon's portico.

It's open and public. Christian preaching is not in smoky back rooms. It's not an elite, secret, hidden activity.

It happens in open, public. The message of Jesus Christ is openly declared and offered in a way and place that is broadly accessible.

Point number one, it's open and public. Point number two, the Christian preacher, Peter, in this case, the Christian preacher deflects attention away from the human preacher and towards Christ. look at verse 12 and 13. Peter begins, the crowd is buzzing, they're all around. Peter says, verse 12, men of Israel, why do you wonder at this and why do you stare at us as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?

[18 : 21] The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus. Okay, so you see what Peter's doing? he's immediately saying, no, no, this is not about us, not about me, not about my power or I'm not a magician, this is about Jesus.

This is about the power of Jesus. The power of Jesus has made this man walk, has given him, he says later, this perfect health.

So Peter deflects any kind of attention or glorification away from himself immediately to Jesus.

Christian preaching is Christocentric.

It focuses attention on Jesus. It directs glory and power to Jesus. We should see that.

We should expect that. we should be real cautious of Christian preaching that doesn't do that. If you have a Christian preacher or so-called Christian preacher who's doing something other than that, you should take note of that and maybe be a little cautious or a lot cautious.

[19 : 47] Because Christian preaching deflects attention away from the human preacher and towards Christ, Christ. And in this sermon and all throughout Acts, Dan Godoy pointed this out to me, reminded me of this before the start of the service.

What is especially in focus about Jesus is his resurrection. That he has risen from the dead. He's alive. And this is actually, we'll see this next week, this is what's so scary and threatening about this sermon and this miracle.

because the Jewish people had magicians who could do some pretty crazy stuff actually. But what Peter is saying is going on here is much more threatening than that.

He's saying Jesus, who you killed, rose from the dead, is alive, and here's the crazy part, his power, Jesus' power, is now at work in the world, plural, through his apostles.

Not just one powerful person. Now there's a bunch of them. It's multiplying. Okay? And this is what's astounding and threatening.

[21 : 06] The resurrection of Jesus. Christian preaching directs attention to Jesus. Point number three. Christian preaching maintains continuity with the God of the Old Testament because Christianity is not a new religion.

Okay? Christian preaching maintains continuity with the Old Testament, the teaching of the Old Testament, because Christianity is not a new religion and the early Christian leaders don't want to start a new religion and they don't think they're starting a new religion.

And this relates to that first point I made. They're going to the temple, they're doing sort of the historic worship thing, worshiping the one true God and these early Christian leaders are firmly convinced they are not doing anything different than that.

And this is so densely compacted into this speech that it'll take a long time to unpack it all. Let me just point out a couple of these things.

Verse 13, Peter says, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers. Three mentions to all the prophets.

[22 : 25] Okay? Look at verse 18, by the mouth of all the prophets. And verse 21, the holy prophets have proclaimed Jesus, Peter is arguing. And verse 24, and all the prophets.

That's a big claim. All the prophets point to Jesus. All of them, Peter says. Verse 22, Moses said concerning Jesus.

Verse 24, Samuel and those who came after him. It's very rare in the New Testament to get a mention of Samuel, actually. There's only three of them. This is one of them.

Peter claims the prophet Samuel pointed to Jesus. So it's a massive claim about the Old Testament books and the witness.

It's a really massive hermeneutical claim that all this writing points to Jesus. It foretells Jesus.

[23 : 27] because this Christian preaching maintains continuity with the God of the Old Testament and is not a new religion. Point number three.

Point number four. Observation number four for this sermon. This sermon is personally confrontational. This is a confrontational sermon.

verse 13. Peter says to this crowd, you delivered over and denied. Verse 14.

Again, you denied. Verse 15. You killed. You killed the author of life.

That is a confrontational thing to say. That kind of thing gets the crowd riled up. And so in this Christian sermon, the preacher is confrontational.

[24 : 34] He calls out sin. Personal sin. You. We should notice that. Christian preaching should confront sin.

Should speak to the personal reality of sin and be convicting. It shouldn't be all it is. But it should have that component to it.

And here, when I'm talking about preaching, I'm certainly talking about doing a sermon like this or teaching a class or something, but I'm also talking about the activity each of us should be engaged in, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

So in your personal interactions, as you seek to witness, if you are never confrontational, people, I don't think you're doing the Christian thing.

If you never point out to someone and say, hey, that's sin, God will judge that, which Peter says at the end of this.

[25 : 59] God will judge you for that. If you never do that, you're not bearing witness to Jesus in the way that the early Christians did.

Because Christian preaching is personally confrontational regarding the reality of sin. Number five, Christian preaching upholds salvation by faith.

Peter does this in verse 16. verse 16. In his name, Peter says, the name of Jesus, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

It's the man's faith that has healed him. It's faith that has done this. The power of Jesus in the faith of the beggar.

The beggar doesn't heal himself, doesn't earn it, doesn't pay for it. He believes in Jesus and the power of God comes coursing into his life and his legs and his muscles and his bones and his brain.

[27 : 21] The salvation is by faith. May we always uphold that in our teaching and preaching.

Number six, Christian preaching calls for repentance.

Verse 19. Peter, very bluntly, repent, therefore, and turn back that your sins may be blotted out.

Repent and turn back. It actually gives us a definition of repentance. That little phrase, repent and turn back. It's what repentance means. Turn. Turn from what you're doing. Stop doing what you're doing.

Turn, start doing something different. Repent. Repent and turn back. Christian preaching calls for repentance, pushes people to a decision point.

Repent. That's closely related to being personally confrontational. You cannot uphold the good news unless you present the bad news, the truth of the bad news, the reality of sin, the necessity of turning from sin.

[28 : 33] Peter does that. We should do that. Christian preaching calls for repentance. That's number six. Here's number seven, the last one. Christian preaching upholds and freely offers the grace of God.

The grace of God is offered freely, openly, publicly. Quickly, I'll go through just a little few examples.

Verse 17, Peter says, I know you acted in ignorance. That is a gracious thing to do. If you're going to stand up in front of people and accuse them of being murderers, it's quite gracious, actually, for Peter at this point.

Sort of rhetorically, he softens the blow. It's a grace-filled thing to do. I know you acted ignorantly. That doesn't excuse them. That doesn't remove their guilt. Ignorance is no excuse, but rhetorically, especially, it's a grace thing to do.

I know you acted in ignorance. Verse 19, turn to Jesus, that your sins may be blotted out. This is on offer. Your sins may be blotted out.

[29:45] Jesus blots out your sins, wipes them away, wipes the slate clean. verse 20, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

That's what's on offer. Part of what's on offer, refreshing, refreshing times with the Lord in his presence, both in this life and in the life to come. We don't have to be alone.

We don't have to live a lonely life. We can live a life of refreshing, refreshment in the presence of the Lord. It's incredible what an offer.

Verse 25, Peter reminds the crowd, the promise given to Abraham that in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed, a blessing. And this points to Christ and Christ fulfills this blessing to Abraham, but it's also the blessing of the gospel that it's a blessing for all the families of the earth. what grace given to people who have killed the author of life. It's the grace of the gospel.

[30:58] It is upheld. It is offered. Verse 26 is how it ends. Peter says, and God raised up his servant to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

That's the grace of God. God is offered to all who believe, who repent, who turn. It's not all. There's confrontation.

But our Christian preaching should offer the grace of God, the reality of forgiveness, God's promise. We say this every week. God promises freely to forgive all who come to him in repentance and faith.

It's the beautiful grace-filled message of the gospel. Again, if that's all we ever say, and there are some preachers, it's what they do.

Just only ever talk about God's love and grace and mercy and forget. Never talk about the bad news. Never confront anyone or anything. So if your message is only ever love and grace and mercy, that does not reflect the early Christian preaching, the early Christian witness.

[32:18] It doesn't. But if your message does not have the grace of God, that's not Christian preaching. well, I need to end.

The honeymoon is over, but God's faithfulness to this church is not over. We're going to see the tension next week and really start to get pretty fierce, but the church continues on in the grace of God, protected by God, defended by God, teaching and preaching as it goes, and so I hope these are helpful things to notice in these sermons, and may our sermons always have that flavor by God's grace.

Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you for the witness of these early Christian leaders, their confidence in you, in your power.

Thank you for the faith of this beggar, and your grace to him. May we understand that grace in our own lives. May you bless us and bless this church, I pray in Christ's name.

Amen.