

May 14 Lesson: Jumping for Joy

Spring Quarter: Jesus Calls Us
Unit 3: The Birth of the Church
Lesson 11: Week of May 14, 2023
Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: Acts 3:1-11

Key Verse: Acts 3:8

Lesson Aims

1. Describe the life of the man who was lame.
2. Compare and contrast the people's reactions to the healing with reactions in Acts 4:1-22 and 14:8-13.
3. Write a prayer for discernment to recognize when to offer Jesus before offering material help.

The Lesson Context

Luke had just given a summary description of the community life of the young church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47). This included miraculous displays after the Day of Pentecost. And these displays are described as being “many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:43).

Now, Hebrews 2:4 confirms God to be the one who authenticated the truth of the gospel preaching by “signs, wonders and various miracles.” Although miraculous healings obviously brought compassionate relief to the afflicted, their primary purpose was to validate the truth of Christianity in general and the work of Jesus in particular (see John 20:30-31). Today's lesson forms part of that larger tapestry.

We are not told exactly how long the events of today's lesson occurred after the Day of Pentecost, but it was probably several weeks later. The church itself had been busy, including a ministry of the selling of property to provide funds for the relief of the poor (Acts 2:45). The apostles were still in Jerusalem, not having returned home to Galilee. They and all the other followers of Jesus met daily in the spacious porticoes of the temple (Acts 1:46a). Activities included meeting in homes for breaking bread – fellowship meals that included the celebration of the Lord's Supper (2:46b).

I. The Setting **Acts 3:1-2**

We are presented in verse 1 with a daily custom of “prayer” that occurred at a specific time of day. It should be noted that all the believers at this point were of Jewish background – there were no Gentile Christians until the events of Acts 10. Belief in Jesus and his resurrection did not

cause “Peter and John” to abandon all Jewish practices, and the same was true later for the apostle Paul (Acts 21:20).

Therefore, it is very interesting that the apostles still kept up the customs and the habits in which they had been trained. It was the hour of prayer, and Peter and John were going into the temple to observe it. They were well aware that the new faith that had come to them and the old discipline could not still walk hand in hand.

Prayer had been important before, and it still was. These traditional times for prayer at the temple were recognized: early morning when the priests made the daily sacrifice, in mid-afternoon, and at sunset (Exodus 29:38-39; Psalm 55:17). This is the second of those, “at three in the afternoon” (see Acts 10:3,30).

Peter and John, the two most important apostles, are depicted here as colleagues and pious Jews, unimpeachable witnesses to the miracle about to occur. The object of the miracle is a beggar they encounter on the incline heading up to the temple.

People suffering from disabilities were a common sight in the ancient world (compare Matthew 15:30), and no less so in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12-16). For someone to have been “lame from birth” indicates a congenital condition rather than a tragic accident (compare John 9:1, 32; Acts 14:8). The legs of this “certain man” had never been able to support his weight and allow him to walk.

Although his physical condition was terrible, he did have two things going for him. First, he had family members or friends who were willing to carry him to the temple “every day.” Second, he had a prime, high-traffic place that seems to be recognized as his right; the exact opposite seems to be the case with the man in John 5:7. This particular gate called “Beautiful,” officially named the gate of Nicanor, is usually understood to have been on the eastern side of “the temple” (some see it as having been the eastern gate for the inner courtyard).

Since the combination of temple prayers and alms-giving characterize Jewish priests, beggars are found outside the Temple at three o’clock in the afternoon. Such is true of the man in this story. Outside of being at the gate called “Beautiful,” he seems to have no other source of income.

Question! What adjustments can your congregation make to ensure that people with disabilities can easily participate in worship and other activities in your church?

II. The Expectations

Acts 3:3-6a

The book of Acts sets up a collision course: the men going into the Temple hear a beggar’s request. This man confronted everyone who entered by this gate, just by his presence alone. Peter and John may have seen him before, and he may have seen them since the apostles had been walking in the temple daily.

The Greek word translated “money” occurs 13 times in the New Testament (examples, Matthew 6:2, 3, 4; Luke 11:41; 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3, 10); it refers to a duty-driven monetary gift to the poor and needy. Jesus never renounced the practice of giving to the poor, but he did condemn those who made a show of their giving to gain praise and honor (Matthew 6:2-4). Peter and John had no doubt given to beggars many times, both in Jerusalem and in their hometown.

Someone said, “There are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, “I hate to,” duty giving says, “I ought to,” and thanksgiving says, “I want to.” In giving to the poor and needy, Jesus would suggest “thanksgiving.”

Peter, no longer the wishy-washy denier from Jesus’ trials, speaks to the man with confidence. What Peter says first is interesting to compare with a previous verse, Acts 3:3. That verse indicates that the beggar had already seen the two apostles when Peter says, “Look at us.” Therefore, the request by Peter isn’t for the man to do something entirely different but for him to do something more intensely. That extra intensity undoubtedly results in making eye contact. In any case, the two apostles gain the full attention of the man.

Question! How can we practice being more attentive to people we might be tempted to ignore?

In verse 6a Peter says, “Silver or gold I do not have...” Imagine the depth of the lame man’s disappointment at this announcement. Led to expect much, he is now persuaded to expect nothing. The moment must have been fraught with bewilderment for this lame man. Hope was stirred again, but for what?

Back to Peter and John! To shirk one’s duty to care for the needy by not giving alms violated at least the spirit of the law, which required the people of Israel to care for those who were in need (see Deuteronomy 26:12). Others observing at this busy gate would have seen the apostles’ failure to give alms as being shamefully unprepared.

III. The Wonder **Acts 3:6b-11**

“...But what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (v.6b). Thought it’s not the end of the story, Peter did indeed have something precious to “give” this poor man: healing in “the powerful name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

Of course, this is the center of the whole event. The name represents the authority, just as the signature of any person carries with it full commitment of all he or she is and has.

Note that Peter did not present himself as having miraculous powers (examples, Acts 3:12; 10:26). If the man were to “walk,” the power would come from his Lord.

It has been suggested by some that the man might not have wanted to be healed. They speculate that he was delivered daily to a prime spot for begging, perhaps a more lucrative gig than we might guess. However, this is to misunderstand the anguish of those with disabilities. For sure, some do indeed rise above the limitation of their disability, but many with a disability would like

to have it removed. As we have been encouraged, it is important to acknowledge the unique stories of people with disabilities and not assume a universally applicable narrative.

We need to remember that this man before us had been disabled from birth. Thus, his disability was not from disease or injury. He was not being “healed” or “restored,” technically speaking; since he was being made whole for the first time in his life.

At any rate, Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And in responding to the touch of a human hand, the lame man responded also to the power of God.

Before going further, I want to illustrate the power of the human hand – the power of touch. A friend’s wife was seriously ill in the hospital. He was attending a worship service in the hospital chapel. There were not many others, but the man sitting behind him was suffering. My friend just lovingly reached out behind him and grasped the other man’s hand. That loving gesture opened up further conversation and ministry following the worship service.

We further note that the right hand can indicate honor as the left hand indicates dishonor (see Matthew 25:31-46).

In verse 8, it is hard for those who are well to imagine the delight of this man who now could stand for the first time in his life. For him, there is more than having his feet and ankles made whole. He also learned to walk and jump instantly. Toddlers take months to learn to walk well and even longer to learn to hop about. Adults who have suffered traumatic injuries to the spine or legs can testify to the challenges of learning how to walk again. But because of being made whole, the lame man could walk and jump and leap instantly. His vigorous activity expressed his joy and also demonstrated the completeness of his cure.

And, notice that the man’s newfound physical abilities were accompanied by a sign of spiritual health: as he was walking and jumping, “the man praised God.” This would be appropriate 100 percent of the times such a miracle happened, but surprisingly it did not (contrast Luke 17:15-18).

We see in verses 9 and 10 that this man, now jumping about and happily “praising God,” was instantly recognized by those who frequented the temple courts. It is likely that he had only one set of clothes and one head covering. They had seen him many times, a beggar who had occupied a place at the “gate called Beautiful” for years. They had seen him so often and for so long that there was no doubt in their minds that he truly had been disabled and was now doing physical things that defied his disability. This caused “wonder and amazement” for them, for this could only have been the work of God (see Luke 5:26; compare and contrast with Acts 4:1-22 and 19:8-13).

In verse 11, we see that the man who was healed held onto Peter and John. In the man’s gesture there was enthusiastic gratitude, coupled perhaps with an unconscious fear that the miracle would depart with them if they were allowed out of his presence.

We are told that “all the people” who witnessed this miracle congregated in an area of the temple known as Solomon’s Colonnade. This was a covered open-air area on the east side of the largest temple courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles.

So the healed man had gone into the temple with Peter and John (v.8), and he came out with them, perhaps when the time of prayer ended. The three had made their way to Solomon’s porch, and they were joined by the astonished crowd who had seen the miracle.

Conclusion

Over half of Jesus’ miracles recorded in the Gospels involved people who were sick, blind, mute, deaf, or otherwise suffering a physical disability. And this does not count summary statements where we are told that Jesus “healed many” (see Mark 1:34). The word used several times to describe Jesus’ attitude and action is “compassion.” Jesus cared deeply for those who had disabilities, and he wants his church to have compassion for them as well.

So, what can our churches do to enhance our ministries to those with disabilities?

- (1) We can make sure our sanctuaries and ministry areas are accessible to those with disabilities.
- (2) We can invite those with disabilities to serve, speak, read scripture, help plan, greet, and pray for others.
- (3) We can listen and encourage those with disabilities to guide us in effectively meeting their needs.

Action Plan

1. How can you practice meeting a person’s physical needs while also not ignoring his or her spiritual needs?
2. How can believers be attentive to the wonder and amazement of God’s miraculous work in the world?
3. What do you think is the most important takeaway from today’s lesson?

Resources For This Lesson

1. “2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Lesson, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 313-320.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X,” pages 76-79.
3. “Standard Bible Commentary (Acts)” edited by Orion Root and John W. Wade, pages 19-23.

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