

## The people at our doorstep

*Acts 3:1-10 ESV*

- (1) Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.*
- (2) And a man lame from birth was being carried whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the 'Beautiful Gate' to ask alms of those entering the temple.*
- (3) Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.*
- (4) And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."*
- (5) And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.*
- (6) But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"*
- (7) And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.*
- (8) And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*
- (9) And all the people saw him walking and praising God,*
- (10) and recognized 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.*

Here we have an encounter between the world and the Church.

Here we have a man born into a condition that he had no control over. Born into a condition that he has no knowledge of.

All he knows is that he is not functioning as others function. His body is not fitting the divine purpose.

Something is wrong with him and he has been like that since birth

He knows there is something greater for him.

He knows he was created for greater things than this.

But here he sits, broken and begging outside of the temple- outside of the building that houses the very presence of God.

He is sitting there doing all that he knows to do. He knows nothing other than his broken state.

He is begging and dependant upon the pity of mankind, begging for scraps.

He can't choose his life.

He has no power over his life.

He has to sit and hope that someone will notice him

Someone will pay him a little attention and he can take home enough to meet the demands of today.

All his focus is on the demands of the day.

All his attention is consumed with the here and now- the temporal, the food he needs, the money he needs for lodging, the money for medicine.

He is sitting right outside the building that should represent greater things. This place, this temple, should speak possibility into his soul for this life and all eternity.

He sits there hoping, worrying, not knowing how this day will end and what tomorrow holds for him.

Now the gate that this man sat outside of was significant.

According to Josephus, there were 9 gates that surrounded the temple and they were covered in silver and gold

Yet there was one more beautiful than all of them, larger than the others, and right outside the temple doors itself

It was a very famous gate and it was common for people and members to come to the temple at the time of prayer and leave their crippled friends and family members outside so that they could beg while the crowds passed in and out.

I read this story and I see three groups of people.

- The lame man, who represents the church
- The crowds flooding into the temple to pray – which to me represents the religious in our day and age
- The two Apostles – which to me is the model of what the church should be

### **You see friend, most of the world is like the lame man**

There lives are broken and decimated by sin and sinful living.

They are spiritually crippled, spiritually incapable of getting themselves into the presence of God.

They are barred by the broken nature, restrained in their minds and spirits.

Have you ever been like that friend?

Have you ever been so sick that you have looked around at healthy people and you just wanted to walk like they could walk?

Have you ever been in such a state of mind that you could not find your way out? So dark that you longed for someone to come and help you find the light.

I was sitting and talking with someone I know well just last week. A man full of potential and possibility yet plagued with depression and the darkest of thoughts.

He said to me that sometimes his life is like trying to stand on a broken leg, it looks fine on the outside.

It all looks like he should be able to run and compete, but when this thing comes upon him he said he can bare no weight.  
He feels incompetent,  
A failure and useless.

A failure to those that trust him and useless to those that love him.

And all the time the world just walks on by.

That is how this beggar felt.  
That is how most of the people in the world feel today.

Most people are not looking for answers,  
Most people are trying to survive in the midst of their brokenness

This cripple wasn't even looking at who was walking by.

Peter had to say "look at us...."

He was just sitting there with enough energy to raise a hand dependant on the pity of others

### **The religious crowds**

You say to yourself, "Well that can't be true of Texas. We have all these great churches; we are in the Bible belt. Our economy is strong, no one should feel like that".

That's what the crowds probably felt every Sabbath as they walked to prayers in the great temple

Here was a man in the Holy city.  
Outside the greatest temple surrounded by the most religious people of his day.

The greatest religions personalities all gathered for prayer,  
the most popular religious figures.... They all flooded into the spiritual and social event that was temple

And still he sat, he begged, he starved. He was crippled.

We live in Texas with more churches per capita than just about any city in the world. Yet our city is amongst the least transformed by the power of the gospel- the least transformed.

I met with a group of local Christian leaders and we were talking about the state of the USA and the lack of impact of the churches. They were talking about the condition of the lives of our people and how the gospel is wonderfully contained within our modern temples and yet has had no lasting impact or deep penetration into the surrounding communities

Crime

Abortion

Divorce

Poverty

Bankruptcy

Moral corruption

Religious division and sectarian politics.

Lack of supernatural manifestations and divine occurrences

All of these things are still major problems

We have more big names.

More priests

More modern Christian temples, yet we are surrounded by crippled people without hope.

Crippled people looking for an answer.

Crippled people just trying to make it one more day.

The church is really being the church when it can be said of us as it was said of the disciples of the book of Acts, that these men turned the world upside down.

When the church is in cheerful coexistence with the very world system she is called to change and influence, then something is wrong.

## **The followers of Jesus**

Now then there is Peter and John.

But you say...they were special  
They were the Apostles.

Think of this....up until just days before- they had walked into that temple and through the same gate for years, probably passed the same man, or men like him, and never been moved, never been compelled to do anything for them other than throw some loose change.

Yet it was different on this day

Something had happened to these men  
Something had changed them so dramatically that they now had answers where before they would have just ignored a beggar and felt hopeless to help

These two men had something that the other religious folks did not have.

They had something that the world was looking for

They had their lives changed by Christ.

## Things I notice in this encounter:

### **1. When the man cried out, he cried out in his poverty, looking for the least.**

But when the Apostles replied they skip right past the symptoms and gave him the solution.

So often we feel more comfortable wasting a person's time, then saving their life.

We will talk about everything else except the most glaring need and issue in their life.

Peter wasn't going to waste his time talking around an issue. He was going to address the issue

Speak right to the problem

What if the man had said "no"?

Have you ever met a crippled or broken person who said "no" to the thought of a miracle?

I remember walking up to a man in a coffee shop once, oxygen mask, looking like death was just days away and asking if I could pray for him. He said "yes", his daughter got upset

It is not the well that need a physician, but the sick

Friend, people want their world messed with, if you've got the answer

### **2. The man was looking for a handout. The Apostles gave him a hand up.**

This beggar didn't know that life could be different.

He had never had anyone offer him a solution other than the one that was customary

Other than the one that society allowed

All his life he had been in this condition

All his life, some 40 odd years he had been dependant upon the mercy of others

And life had beat him down

Every day they dressed and cleaned him

Every day they bundled him up in is rags and his filth

Every day they put him out in the public walk ways to beg for his food  
To try and contribute to the household expenses'

What a terrible thing when a man is reduced to a beggar

When he can not rise and go to work and feed his family, take his kids to the game

You see this man sat and watched the world go to church, watched the world pass him by

Always looking up

Seeing nothing but the dirt on other peoples shoes, hearing the stories like a dim roar around him

Life had passed him by

There was nothing in his future but shame, poverty and an uncertain future.

Now when the Apostles came by, they had no money on them

It was customary to have money on you when you went to temple to give to the beggars

Maybe they had expended all of this.

Maybe they had given it all away before they approached the Beautiful Gate

They could have gotten more money. Barnabas was selling his property to fund the next round of mission trips, but they didn't

You see, what we are seeing here is a change in how the Apostles perceived themselves.

We are seeing a paradigm shift in the way that they viewed their faith and themselves.

Before as good religious men, the most they could give was money

Now as follows of Jesus Christ, it was the least they could give.

*Peter stopped and said.....look at us! Don't look through us as all poor people do. Don't look down as a beaten man does. Don't look away fearing rejection. Look at us*

*We have something far greater than what you ask for*

*You ask for shekels, we will give you a future  
You ask for money, we will give you something far greater than the silver or gold we could get for you*

And the word said....he proclaimed Christ to him as the power unto his salvation, took him by his right hand and LIFTED HIM UP.

Friend, that is what the church is supposed to do

We are supposed to tell the world about Christ, show the world the power of God and pull them from their sin and depravity into an upright position, walking with God

Don't feed a crippled man if you can get him to walk

I never want to run a feeding program  
I want to run a program that would return dignity to broken souls  
Give strength to the lame  
Pride to shame  
That is the power of the gospel

### **3. The religious people walked passed him daily, the followers of Christ heard his cry.**

How easy it is to get into a habit of blaming a broken person for their brokenness when you have no answers

The religious people had no answers, so they looked at the broken and said things like “Their parents were sinners” or “They must have done something terrible” or “This is the judgment of God”

May God forgive us for the rash judgments and foolish statements we all have made at times

It takes no more effort to say “*rise up and walk*”, than it does to say, “*this is the judgment of God*”

It takes a complete change of heart

You have to get your eyes off yourself and look at the people at your doorstep

### **4. The encounter that happened was supernatural in origin and changed the man’s life forever.**

A life transformed by the power of God is instantly recognized by all those around it.

It does not have to be sold – it is seen.

A life transformed by the power of God is the greatest tool for evangelism and city wide impact.

You see, this encounter was a supernatural one

It was one that was very publically seen and very publically attested to.

Your witness needs to be a public thing.

Your prayers for the sick need to be a public thing

You will never see the miracles you desire to see in here, because this is the training ground for out there.

The training happens here  
The real action happens there

Ask my family, my staff, my friends

If you have been around me enough you would have seen me pray for a sick person in a public place

Ask them what there need is, and tell them a story about a miracle I have seen, and pray for them

The supernatural touch of God is something that changes a life for ever

Healing of Richard the drummer – drummer in AZ

Healing of tattoo artist in AZ

**5. The world does not like the church, when the church is doing what it is supposed to do. Preaching what it is suppose to preach. Being who it is suppose to be.**

The world is comfortable with the church preaching a message and acting in a way more akin with Refined Paganism that Biblical Christianity.

You know what I mean

The pagans would pray to there deity in times of need, or if there was sickness, or they needed to win a war.

The world is comfortable when the church turns up for a national day of prayer.

When we turn up with the bells and the smells, when we perform our little rituals and give everyone a sense of order in the universe.

In fact the world encourages that sort of thing. Governments embrace it

It is good for the masses.

Karl Marx said it best.... "Religion is an opiate for the people, it lulls them, it dulls their senses, it gives them a false sense of euphoria".

But that is not what Christianity, true Christianity does.

Christianity looks at you and says "Ah I know your problems, I see your issue –your broken, your crippled, you must accept that

And if you do.... that is the end of your bad news and the beginning of your good news...'

This Jesus whom you have crucified.

This Jesus whom you have killed and ignored.

This Jesus whom you have hated and defiled – He wants to lift you out of your filth, your sin your sickness,

He wants to give you something money can not buy, that fame can not buy.

I don't have silver and gold with me, and even if I did, it wouldn't solve your problems

Christ wants to solve your problem.

Christ wants to see you walk whole in this life and the life to come.

He wants you to live with dignity and purpose as a child of God

## **6. Our faith is not a private affair, it is a public need.**

The disciples were bold in their proclamation of Christ.

They didn't try to be culturally sensitive to the rights of the Jews.  
They freed concerns for the souls of mankind.

People need what you have got, or God would have given you something else

Peter and John didn't attend an evangelism program to learn how to pray for the sick

They had their lives changed by Christ and wanted to do something about it

They didn't attend a kingdom finance seminar to get a passion to help a poor man

They saw a poor man and wanted to do something about it

## 7. Our response

How many times do we walk by people and not see them?

*These people at our doorstep.....*

How many times do we listen to what they ask for and don't give them what they need?

- I want to help the business executive with his marriage and family.
- I want to help the young person start their first business.
- I want to help the single parent any way I can.
- I want to help the hungry person find a job
- I want to have a home so babies don't get aborted.
- A school to raise the next generation of Christian leaders.

I want to do all these things...But I **MUST** give them the entire gospel.

The challenge for many Christians is that they no longer see the church as the essential tool for change on the earth.

They have been hurt and discouraged by the people, they have seen leaders and the things they have done in the name of our Lord.

They have seen their minister handle holy things with dirty hand. They have seen them trade the supernatural for silver and gold.

They have seen them bow to public opinion and worldly pressure instead of standing like men backed by heaven.

What a glorious thing to watch someone live their life with a sense that heaven has their back and hell should tremble.

That's how these Men lived.

That is how these men died.

We should aim for nothing less.

You will leave here today and you will drive by people

You will see people sitting in restaurants

You will meet with family members for lunch

You will meet with business associates during the week

What are you doing about bring them to Christ?

What are you doing about inviting them to church?

You know sick people

Do you offer to pick them up and bring them to service for prayer on a Sunday evening?

There is a lady that sometimes comes

Her family brought her to me one night and said, "she can't stay long, she has cancer and doesn't have long to live."

I said fine

Bring her in early and I will pray for her then she can go when she needs to go.

**That was 4 years ago**

She came in, we prayed, she stayed throughout most of the service.

**She still comes to church whenever she is on this side of town**