



## "What Do You Have to Offer" Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"

Acts 3:1-10

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### Acts 3:1-10 (NIV) Peter Heals the Crippled Beggar

<sup>1</sup>One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>Now a man crippled 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. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. <sup>4</sup>Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup>So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

<sup>6</sup>Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." <sup>7</sup>Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. <sup>8</sup>He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. <sup>9</sup>When all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>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 had happened to him.

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*I'll be away the next 2 weeks in Africa.*

### Introduction.

We've all seen them. We've all had the experience of not knowing quite what to do. A panhandler asks us for money, they look destitute, and we try to figure out what the appropriate response is. They position themselves at the end of the off ramp from 360 to Bee Caves Road, or they stand on the median near Walsh Tarlton at the traffic light. There is usually a sign that says "Out of work and just need some help." Some are very clever. One had a guy with a sign that said, "I'm like Obama. I want change!" Another was dressed like Darth Vader holding a sign that said, "Help Me! I'm a Clone War vet and need \$\$\$ to build a Death Star."

Last Wednesday night, Lorie and I were at Sandy's Frozen Custard on Barton Springs Road near the Long Center. I was waiting for our ice cream cones when a guy came up to me and tried to strike up a conversation. And then he said, "I've got a dollar. If I get another one, I can buy a hamburger. Would you give me a dollar?"

What do you do? How do you respond? You wonder if they are just going to use the money for drugs or alcohol. You think, "If they really wanted to get help there are plenty of places in Austin who offer it." But then you catch yourself and feel bad that you're so cynical. You ask yourself, "Didn't Jesus say to give to the one who asks and do not refuse him?" We feel guilty regardless of how we respond.

I reached into my wallet and gave the guy a dollar. But then I got the ice cream cones and hurried back to the car. It was dark, and I didn't feel very safe or comfortable. I wish I could have done what Peter and John did in this passage. I wish I could fix this guy's life and make it all better. What I really wish is that I had the courage to offer more than money.



## **I. The Request of the Cripple.**

The story of the healing of the cripple beggar begins with the straightforward statement that Peter and John went up to the temple at the time of prayer. There were three stated times for prayer in Judaism, and one of them was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The other two were at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices. All pious Jews, like Daniel in the Old Testament (Dan. 9:20-21), and God-fearing Gentiles, like Cornelius later in the book of Acts (10:2), observed these set times of prayer. It was part of the regular rhythm of their lives as they walked with God on a daily basis.

The disciples' arrival at the Temple coincided with that of a man who was crippled from birth. I suspect friends or relatives carried this guy everyday to the temple gate. There he would sit day after day and beg from people as they went into worship. It was a good marketing angle. He figured he could play on people's sympathy and perhaps they would be more generous if they were going to worship God.

The beggar was placed by the temple gate called Beautiful. Most commentators identify this as the Nicanor Gate, which was the main eastern gate to the temple. It was named for a man named Nicanor, who in a terrible storm requested to be thrown overboard with the gate during its transport from Alexandria to Jerusalem. A miracle occurred, it is said, and both were preserved, so the name stuck.

The Jewish historian Josephus described the gate as made of Corinthian brass and was about 75 feet high and had huge double doors. At the foot of this magnificent gate the cripple sat begging. What a contrasting picture, the awesome gate of bronze and this poor crippled beggar. Every day the man was put at the Beautiful Gate, and every day he asked people for money. As Peter and John were about to enter the temple, he asked them, too.

Notice the splendor in the ordinary. The miracle took place when Peter and John were going about their normal activities. There was nothing special about this day, they were not on a spiritual expedition, and they were not out to do an amazing miracle. They were simply going to the temple to pray at 3 o'clock in the afternoon as they did most every day. And there was nothing special about this beggar that day. He had been there every day as before. They had seen him on numerous occasions. God chose to demonstrate His awesome healing power when the disciples were going about their normal daily activities. That is the way it is the way of the spirit.

Some people look for God in the spectacular. They want to do impressive things for the Lord and be an impressive person. But this passage reminds us that God reveals Himself on ordinary days to ordinary people doing ordinary things. The key is to be aware and spiritually attentive, when God's Holy Spirit shows up in the ordinary.

## **II. The Response of the Disciples.**

As Peter and John were about to enter the temple, the crippled asked them for money. The disciples stopped and looked straight at him, and Peter gave two commands to the beggar. First, he said, "Look at us!" Peter wanted his full attention. But by his second command, Peter explained that he had something better to give the man than money. He said, "*Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!*" (3:6). And a miracle occurred. How amazing!

Notice that after Peter spoke these words, he did not then stand back and watch the man struggle to his feet. Instead, he leaned forward and taking the man by the hand he helped him up. It was not a gesture of unbelief but one of love. Peter had seen Jesus do this before when the Lord healed Jairus' daughter and He took her by the hand then. So Peter followed Christ's example, and he did the same thing.



The ministry of touch in helping another person is part of the miracle-working power of God. Sure, God can do it by Himself, but He chooses to involve us, to include us in healing this broken world. Peter made personal contact with the man, and God invites us to do the same, too.

Notice also that what the man wanted was not what he really needed. The beggar asked for money; Peter offered him a new life. All too often, we yearn for something we want and don't realize it's not what we really need. We are willing to settle for money, when our need is healing. We are willing to settle for a temporary fix, when our need is eternal salvation. We are willing to settle for the things of this world, when God wants to give us the riches of heaven. C.S. Lewis once said we are willing to settle for mud puddles when God wants to give us the ocean.

### **III. The Response of the Crowd.**

The text tells us that instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong, so strong and agile that he jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he accompanied the apostles into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. I think of that Old Testament promise in Isaiah which said that when the kingdom of God came, *"Then the lame will leap like the deer"* (Is. 35:6).

A crowd quickly gathered, and they recognized the man as the crippled beggar who had always been a familiar sight for decades at the Beautiful Gate. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to the man, and this provided an opportunity for Peter to give his second sermon as people gathered in what was called Solomon's Colonnade (2:11).

Here is a prelude to the two reactions people always have to the work of God. Some were amazed and open to hearing what God had done. Others, as we shall see next week in the rest of the chapter, took it as an occasion to challenge and oppose Peter and John for what they had done. We experience the same two reactions today. Living for Christ will arouse curiosity and faith in some but opposition and even persecution in others. Don't be surprised. It happened back then; it still happens today.

Later this afternoon, Lorie and I leave for South Africa to be 2 of the 4,000 delegates at Cape Town 2010, the international congress on world evangelization. There we will discuss the challenges the global church faces today not just in the United States but around the world, and one of the things we will hear is that a major obstacle to world missions in many parts of the globe is persecution. Brothers and sisters in Christ are ostracized, beaten and killed for their faith, and these followers of Jesus are willing to pay the price regardless of the cost. Just three days ago Lorie and I received an urgent email prayer request from the organizers of the conference for the Chinese delegates. Their government was considering not granting them their visas to attend.

Last week, I was with a man named Mateen Ellass who is now a pastor in Edmond, OK. Mateen grew up in a Muslim family in Saudi Arabia, but he became a Christian while studying at Stanford University. His conversion led to an estrangement from his family for many years and the threat of punishment and possibly death if he remained in Saudi Arabia. He settled in the US in part to flee the persecution. Opposition to Christianity is still strong in many parts of the world today.

You and I don't face that same kind of threat on our lives. The persecution we encounter is much more subtle. The opposition we face is when our family doesn't understand our new-found commitment to Christ, or the friction we experience in relationships when we begin to make changes in our lives and are no longer willing to do the same things we did before. It comes when we refuse to cut corners or fill out false reports at work which our boss has asked us to do, and we seek to live our lives with greater integrity and honesty. And it occurs when a friend or relative accuses us of shelving our



brains and being a right-wing religious nut because we have become a follower of Jesus Christ. That's the kind of opposition which is more common for you and me.

Some will receive our message with interest and joy. Others will oppose us and reject what we say. But take heart. We're in good company. The earliest disciples and Jesus Himself experienced the very same thing.

### **Conclusion/Application.**

As we close this morning, I want to ask you three questions. *First, in what ways are you crippled today?* What is there in your life that needs to be healed? Some of us need physical healing just like this cripple. Are you battling a debilitating disease – arthritis, cancer, AIDS, diabetes, or asthma? God has the power to heal. Ask Him for a miracle. Look to Him to do a new thing. Prayer isn't magic, and you can't twist the arm of God, but as we see in this text many times God desires to bring healing to our bodies which can lead to a restoration of our souls. It's worth asking. Sometimes He says yes, sometimes He says no, and sometimes He says wait. But you'll never know until you ask.

Others here today are experiencing another kind of paralysis. Some are crippled not in their bodies but in their minds and hearts and spirits. They battle anxiety, worry and depression. Perhaps it is the result of an abusive relationship, or the cruel and hurtful things that have been done to us. Sometimes we are crippled by bitterness and anger, or by the sins of our past, or by a mountain of debt. God can cure than kind of paralysis, too. Where are you crippled today, and how does God want to bring healing?

*The second question I want to ask is are you willing to be God's answer to prayer?* Peter spoke the words of healing to the cripple, and he gave the man his hand and helped him up. Are you available to God? Are you willing to reach out to someone who needs you? Do you look for God to show up in the splendor of the ordinary? How does God want you to join Him on His mission of love to help others? Consider signing up for the iCare net ministry training today and be the hands and feet of Christ.

*Finally, what do you have to offer?* You may be saying, "I don't think I'm all that special. I don't know much of the Bible, and I'm not a theologian. I can't sing that well, and I don't know how to teach. And I surely can't heal anyone!" You may not feel you have that much to offer, but if you give what you have to Jesus that's all He wants. These two disciples didn't have any money, but they did have Jesus. And for this cripple beggar, that was more than enough.

We are beginning our season of stewardship at WHPC. It's a time when we ask unapologetically, "What do you have to offer?" We want everyone to pray about their commitment to Christ and how they will invest in God's kingdom through our church in the coming year with their time, talent and treasure. My prayer is that the Lord will build in us a greater trust in Him in these times of financial uncertainty and a deeper spirit of generosity to the Lord's work in this place.

A few years ago, I received a lesson in generosity which has marked me ever since. I may have shared it before, but it bears repeating. My son David and I joined with 12 others from our former church in Boulder to go on a mission trip to Tanzania. We were there to study the work of Compassion International and to meet the individual children those of us on the trip sponsor ourselves. David and I got to meet Oscar Peter, a young man our family supports.

Before the trip, David and I went to Target and bought a number of gifts to give as presents to Oscar and his family when we met them. On the appointed day, we walked through the slums of Arusha until finally we arrived at the one-room mud and stick building which was the apartment where Oscar and his whole family lived. It was one of four identical rooms along one row, and it had a dirt floor. We learned



that Oscar's mother paid \$2 a month to rent the room, and she sold roasted corn on the side of the road to make a living to support her family. She makes about 25 cents a day selling the roasted corn.

After getting acquainted, David and I opened the gym bag and presented the members of the family with the presents we had brought from America. Their eyes grew as big as saucers as we gave them their gifts, and they all seemed very pleased. Then, as we were leaving, something happened I will never forget. Oscar's mother reached behind a chair, and she presented David and me with a plastic bag which had three oranges in it. This was her gift to us. David and I smiled and accepted her gift with thanks and a hug, and we said goodbye to this dear family as we loaded back into the bus to take us back to our hotel. I thought about those oranges the whole ride back.

Who do you think was the most generous that day? David and I with the many presents we brought from America, gifts we could afford which required little sacrifice, or Oscar's mother who gave out of her poverty, a gift which surely she could not afford? Who trusted in the Lord more that day? David and I who bought those presents out of our abundance, or Oscar's mother who surely made at great sacrifice to do what she did? *"What do you have to offer?"* It's a question that continues to haunt me.

I pray that God will never let me forget the smile on Mrs. Peter's face when she presented us the three oranges. It was the expression of one who had learned a life of generosity and the fact that The Way of the Spirit is giving away whatever you have to offer. That's true whether you're a panhandler on the streets of Austin or a member at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church. Amen.

