

“The Impossible Walk”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 6/14/2020
Text: Acts 3:1-10 at FBC of Newport, NH

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

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

—Acts 3:1-10 (NIV)

Now we come to the next stand-out event after Pentecost. It doesn’t take place the very next day. It comes on “One day ...” after the new routine described in Acts 2:42ff settles into place. They were taking care of each other’s needs, meeting in homes as well as in the temple courts and growing in numbers. As Luke described it to us last week, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

These weren’t all brand new activities, of course, for the routine of prayer has been woven into the Jewish culture for as long as it has existed. That’s why Peter and John were walking through that “Beautiful Gate” that afternoon. It’s one of the three designated times to pray. There was morning, afternoon and sunset. The 3PM afternoon time revolved around the Jewish *tamid* sacrifice at the temple where the priests also sang songs, blew trumpets and worshipped face down before God.

Interestingly, this shows us that those early believers in Jesus were not exactly Catholics, nor Protestants nor Eastern Orthodox in the expression of faith in Christ—they were practicing Jews—Jews who were also very much practicing their newfound belief in Jesus as their Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world. And this combination of Jewish prayer and Jesus as the Jewish Messiah came together there in Jerusalem.

Peter and John came upon a crippled man who was known to be stationed at the gate called “Beautiful.” This was probably what’s known also as the Double Gate located on the southern wall of the Temple Mount and is walled up today. It has a wide, monumental stairway leading up to it and was popular with most all the pilgrims going to the Temple. It is also probably the area where Peter preached his first sermon on Pentecost, as that great crowd gathered there. This was a perfect location for someone making his living through begging, as well as for someone who’s infirmity might have kept him out of the temple area. And the chosen spot for God to demonstrate the advancing of His Kingdom.

Upon meeting at the gate, the crippled man asked for money and looked at Peter expecting to get something from him. Instead, he got an impossible command from Peter in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. "Rise up and walk," he said to the man who could not walk! Then Peter even reached out and started to help the man up. As he did the crippled man's legs grew strong and he was healed right on the spot. He not only could get up, he could walk! But he was so excited about it he wasn't content with just walking. He jumped around and praised God. Then, as everyone was headed through the Beautiful Gate to the Temple, he joined Peter and John and the rest of them. Can't you just see everyone walking normally, while this man goes walking and leaping and praising God?

Once inside it doesn't take long for people to notice prancing around and shouting praises to God. Then they recognize him as the crippled man who previously was always on the *outside* of that gate. The crowd was stunned with amazement.

Now, I think I know what you're thinking. *If only the church could have a crippled man or woman healed every week, we'd have a crowd here in no time.* But you know God's not going to do that. Because he didn't even do that for the church in Jerusalem, not every week anyway. This one guy was it. And though it did draw a crowd, it also got Peter and John thrown in jail. So maybe there's more to this healing than what's on the surface, which is usually the case when it comes to miracles done in the name of Jesus.

Here's what I see Jesus preaching to us through Peter and that crippled man: **The Church is in the business of calling people to walk an impossible walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.** And because God is real, because he sent his Son Jesus to walk among us, to die for our sins and rise from the dead, because he has already walked that walk on our behalf, we can indeed follow him. We can't do it on our own strength. We could not do it if there were no God. And we could not do it if God had not sent us this Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But he *did* send him! And so we *can* do it. And we can call other people to do it as well. Jesus has done everything necessary for us to follow him.

And something else too: **There's no shortage of crippled bones in any of our lives which could keep us from following Jesus.** We all of us need to overcome some impossible barrier in order to obey his commands. But remember, God's the one who provides. Peter didn't look at that crippled man expecting him to get up and walk on crippled bones and atrophied muscles alone did he? Hardly. In fact, Peter started out by helping the man up himself. He didn't just stand there yelling at him to, "Get up!" And then, after Peter started to help the crippled man, that's when God did the truly heavy lifting. And there was more than one life transformed as a result: the crippled man and all the people who would believe in Christ from his testimony.

Are you following Jesus Christ? Do you think you're able to do that on your own strength? I hope you don't. Now for some people it's more obvious that God has worked miraculously to enable them to follow Christ. While to others it's only obvious to a few. (Hopefully including one's self!) And that's okay. That's God's business too.

Now, to help us recognize God's powerful, miraculous touch upon us all, I'd like to leave you with the words to a song I wrote back in 1979. I think it captures a number of ways in which any of us might be transformed by God and cause others to think again about themselves and about this Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Think Again

by Steve Hammond

© January 19, 1979

A timid man I am; (I am)
A timid man I am.
But if you do ever see me bold,
Then you must think again, (again)
Then you must think again.

A foolish man I am; (I am)
A foolish man I am.
But if you do ever see me wise,
Then you must think again, (again)
Then you must think again.

A crippled man I am; (I am)
A crippled man I am.
But if you do ever see me strong,
Then you must think again, (again)
Then you must think again.

But a wretched man I am; (I am)
A wretched man I am.
But if you do ever see my Lord,
Then you must think again, (again)
Then you must think again.

But if you do ever see my Lord,
Then you must think again, (again)
Then you must think again.