

## SCRIPTURE STUDIES

## ACTS CHAPTER 3

## “A STRANGE THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO CHURCH”

The Score? Church 3,000, Jews 0. In spite of the opposition by the Jewish leaders, the church of Jesus Christ had been fielded and on the first day scored an unprecedented 3,000 new converts to the Jews 0. We now come to chapter three of Luke’s history of enthusiastic ecclesiastic endeavors. The big feast day of Pentecost is past and the new church begins to spread out in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and eventually to the whole world.

Historian, Dr. Luke, begins his third installment of the day-by-day developments rather abruptly, writing: “*Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.*” (Luke 3:1) Wait a minute! The church had been born a few days before; it was distinct from the Jewish form of religion, so why were they going to the temple? The temple was for Old-Era-Moses-Followers, the church was for the New-Era-Jesus-Followers. What is going on anyway?

Well, Jews did not cease being Jewish when they believed in Jesus. After Peter’s revolutionizing sermon on the Day of Pentecost, those who became believers in Jesus saw in Him the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. For a time they continued to meet at the temple until the opposition became too intense and then they moved out and met elsewhere.

***A Pair on The Way To Prayer.***

One day, soon after the church was begun, Peter and John, following the regular routine of the Jews, went to the afternoon prayer meeting.

***The Prayer Period.***

“..... *at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.*” There were three stated hours for prayer: the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour, which was 9:00 a.m.; the 6<sup>th</sup> hour which was noon and the 9<sup>th</sup> hour which was 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Peter and John, with the crowd, were shuffling their way up the temple mount toward the temple in the afternoon.

The early Christians had not as yet separated themselves from the temple form of worship, as they were soon to do. Prayer was important to them before the break from Judaism and it remained important to them afterwards. They had said to Jesus, “*Lord, teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1) and He did, both by precept and example. Never would they forget the last prayer they had heard Him pray as He knelt in Gethsemane beneath the old olive trees.

***The Prayer Partners.***

The New Testament church was a praying church. It survived and thrived in the midst of opposition and oppression because it was a praying church. It was *born* in a prayer meeting in the Upper Room and it was *borne* along on the wings of prayer. Therefore, to read that Peter and John were on their way to a prayer meeting is no surprise.

“Peter and John” – here were two opposites, two men with drastically different temperaments, from two totally different backgrounds. Peter was the impetuous, brash, loud preacher and

John the soft-spoken, poetic apostle of love. Peter the natural leader, John the natural follower. But they were brothers in the faith and they prayed together.

This is a lovely example of the melding effect of common cause; the triumph of sublimating personal differences for a greater purpose. We have heard the saying, “The family that prays together, stays together.” That is a truism, the full force of which, should be realized also in the church. Every believer in Christ should be willing to genuinely fellowship with every other believer; every member of Christ’s church should be able to pray with every other member; every believer should gladly join hands with every other member of the assembly to forward the work of the church.

How far would we walk to participate in a prayer meeting three times per day? To really evaluate our prayer lives we need only to ask one question: “How much would pray if I had no personal needs?”

*“Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray,  
This is my heart-cry, day unto day;  
I long to know Thy will and Thy way,  
Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray.”*

#### ***A Beautiful Deed at The Beautiful Gate.***

*“A certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.” (Acts 3:2-8)*

The poor were placed at the temple gates to beg for alms from the worshippers. The Jews considered giving to the poor an act especially pleasing to God and meritorious to the giver.

#### ***The Man Who Was Carried.***

The man who asked Peter and John for money was not only poor, he was crippled. Ever since his birth he had been unable to walk and for forty years had been carried everywhere he went. (Acts 4:22)

#### ***The Men Who Cared.***

Peter and John were not in such a hurry to pray that they did not take time to practice what they had already prayed before. The beggar, extending a hand for a hand-out, received quite a surprise. “Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have.” One must have in order to give. Peter and John did not have what he expected. However, they gave him the unexpected. They did not help to sustain the man in his infirmity but they set about to remove it. The lame man asked Peter and John to give him what they did not have; they asked the lame man to do what he could not do. Both requests were answered.

### *The Master Who Cured.*

Peter said, *“what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”*

This was not a pre-determined “healing service.” There are no such services recorded in the New Testament. In the routine of life Peter and John met this man where he was in his daily life and ministered to him. Their hearts of compassion went out to him and, unlike the Priest and Levite on the road to Jericho who walked past the wounded man and went on their way, (Luke 10:31,32), Peter and John stopped and taking him by the hand, said *“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”* He received a priceless gift from penniless men!

The lame leaped! Then this man who had been a cripple for forty years not only walked but leaped! *“So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.”* Peter and John took someone to church with them that day! They were witnesses as well as worshippers. The religion that they heard in the sanctuary, they practiced in the street. Let us go and do likewise!

### ***An Opportunist Uses An Opportunity.***

Peter was not one to miss an opportunity to preach about His Lord. Preaching the Good News was in his blood. Here at the temple court he was surrounded by Jews who also had come to the temple at 3:00 p.m. to pray. Their prayer time was interrupted by a praising ex-panhandler whom they recognized as the fellow they had seen many times outside the gate. (Acts 3:10a) *“They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”* (v.10b)

### *The Minister’s Claim.*

Here is preacher Peter, a questioning crowd in a religious mood, at the temple court – what an opportunity! And Peter took advantage of it:

*“So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”* (Acts 3:12-16)

Dr. M.R. DeHaan of Radio Bible Class fame in Grand Rapids, MI, wrote in *Our Daily Bread*: “Peter did not ‘pull any punches’ when addressing the murderers of Jesus. To be sure, it made people angry but it also brought conviction to sinners. He who never makes anyone angry says nothing worthwhile. Too many of us are so afraid of “offending” sinners that we fail to warn them of their danger. It is better to accomplish things clumsily than to do nothing at all. A critic once said to the Evangelist Charles Alexander, “I don’t like the way you do personal work.” Replied Alexander, “Neither do I. Tell me, how do you do it?” Shamefacedly

the critic admitted he “didn’t do much of it.” Alexander replied, then I still like the way I do it, better than the way you don’t!” While we recommend tact and common sense in approaching people for Christ, there is still nothing worse than *not* approaching them at all.”

### *The Master’s Name.*

Peter makes much of the name of Jesus Christ in his sermon. Why so much emphasis on Jesus’ name? Because there is authority in the name of Jesus! Not magic but might! Peter said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (v.6) and “His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong.” (v.16)

A name is all these Christians had –they had no money, no status in society, no influence with the powers that were, but they had that wonderful name! There are seven different names ascribed to Jesus in Peter’s sermon:

- “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” – v.6
- “His Son Jesus” – v.13, 26
- “The Holy One” – v.14
- “The Just One” – v.14
- “The Prince of Life” – v.15
- “Christ” – v.18
- “Jesus Christ” – v.20

Continuing in Acts chapter four, the Jewish authorities asked, “by what name have you done this?” (4:7) Peter replied, “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth....” (4:10) and then he declared: “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (4:12)

Is there a name that is above every realm, supernal and infernal, celestial and terrestrial? Yes! Jesus! “The name which is above every name.” (Phil.2:9)

*“Jesus is the sweetest name I know,  
And He’s just the same as His lovely Name,  
And that’s the reason why I love Him so;  
For Jesus is the sweetest name I know.”*

- Lila B. Long

### *The Multitude’s Shame.*

Peter preached Christ crucified, proclaimed His resurrection, persuaded his hearers to repent and pointed them to the day when Jesus would return again.

He said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:19-21)

Such a forceful message as Peter preached in religious Jerusalem, mind you, and of all places on the court surrounding the temple, the most holy place in Jewry, could get a fellow in trouble, and did! But what was the response of his listeners? Some of them were ashamed at the manner in which they had treated “the Prince of Life” and they repented. “Many of

*those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”*

(4:4)

There must have been quite a mass of people at the temple that day. Out of the crowd about 2,000 believed Peter’s message so that the total number of Christians grew to “*about five thousand.*” (4:4)

## CONCLUSION

A strange thing happened on the way to church in the first few days after the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ. Peter and John were the conduits of Jesus’ power to heal a man who, at age forty, had never walked. Crowds at the temple were amazed. Peter preached a sermon about Jesus Who had healed the man and about 2,000 people were converted to Jesus.

This story should encourage us to be both visible and verbal in witnessing. If you do not have two pennies to rub together, you possess something that is more precious than gold, and more powerful than dynamite! “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*” (Rom. 1:16)

And think about this: more people live on earth today than at any other time in the world’s history. There are more unbelievers than at any time since humans first inhabited the earth. Every day there are fewer people on earth who have heard the Jesus story. Why? Every time there is a birth the number of unbelievers grows. The physical birth rate outpaces the spiritual birth rate.

Let us look for opportunities to do good. “*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*” (Gal.6:9) But don’t wait until you can heal a lame person and thereby attract a crowd in order to witness! Let us win them one by one whenever and wherever we have the opportunity. And, we make opportunities by helping those in need.

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