

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Acts 3 - The first evidence of Power of Jesus' Name

Before the Lord Jesus left this world to go back to His Father, He said to His disciples in John 14:12, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto My Father". He was referring to the things that the disciples would do in His Name after the Holy Spirit had come down. The book of the Acts, while it is an historical record of the witness and the work of the apostles, it could be called, 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit'.

Last week we have already thought about the wonderful effect that the very first preaching had, when Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost and bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, as recorded in Acts 2. That day 3,000 people were saved. Something completely new was happening on earth, because the Holy Spirit had come down into the hearts of men and women. Great power and boldness was given to them, and the words that they preached, completely changed the lives of those who believed. That effect was described as "These that have turned the world upside down", later on in this book when the Apostle Paul went to Thessalonica.

In Acts 3 and 4, the first miracle that Peter and John did is central to the preaching, and then to the first persecution that fell on the apostles. Let us read the first few verses of chapter 3. "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, who they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked for alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: 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. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God".

This forty year old man was an example of the terrible effect of sin in the world. He was also a picture of the dreadful condition of the nation of Israel. That magnificent temple in Jerusalem, which took king Herod 46 years to build, was an attempt to do something impressive in the eyes of men for God's glory. The very gate that we have read about was called "Beautiful". But what a contrast to the grandeur of the building was the poor, lame man who was laid there every day. The temple was an example of man's attempt to look religious outwardly. The lame man, in all his helplessness was a picture of what man had become, through sin, in God's eyes.

We read at the end of the Gospel of Luke that the disciples were continually in the temple. Here, on this special day, something was brought into that temple that had never been seen there before. Two simple and unlearned men, who were thought nothing of in the world, but who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, went there. Everything changed because of this. The temple, not many years later was destroyed by the Romans as the Lord Jesus said it would be. Destroyed, gone, finished forever, never to be built again until the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. But the work of the Holy Spirit completely changed the lame man, and put into his life something that would last for eternity. I think we can begin to see the importance of this first miracle. Man's work is set aside; it could not do anything for the lame man. He had been like that for 40 years. This is a complete period of testimony to man's inability to do anything about himself in the eyes of God. But as soon as the Holy Spirit, in these two disciples, and faith in the man, come together everything is put right for him and for God.

What a lesson we all need to learn from this! The cross of Jesus of Nazareth, His resurrection and going back to heaven, then the descent of the Holy Spirit is the only power that can alter our lives for God. No outward show of pomp and glory will do for Him. Only what the Holy Spirit does will do for God.

The man looked to Peter and John expecting to receive a gift. Peter told him to "look on us". No doubt he had often looked on that temple, it had done nothing for him. He had looked to many people on many occasions for help, but his condition had not improved. Now he looked to Peter and John. The words, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk", did everything for him. This is referred to in verse 16, "And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong".

The Lord Jesus, when He was here, went often into that temple and probably saw this man many times, but did not heal him. Now in the power of His name, by the Holy Spirit the man is healed. The miracles that Jesus did were great works, but now the apostles were doing greater works in His NAME because the Holy Spirit had come.

Peter grasped the opportunity this miracle gave them when all the people ran together unto them in the porch 'greatly wondering'. He said to them, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" He turned their attention away from themselves to the Lord Jesus and bore witness to what God had done to the very Man that they had crucified: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus: whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead whereof we are witnesses."

In 4:13, the high priest, the scribes and the elders were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus". They could well have said to Peter, "What right have you to accuse us of denying Him? Look what you did". But they did not because the words they had heard reached their consciences, and they were convicted by them.

It is, however, remarkable that Peter could use such language, considering his own denial of the Lord Jesus. What had changed in Peter's life? In Luke's account of the incident of Peter's boasting, that even if all others denied Jesus, he would not, the Lord Jesus said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, or restored, strengthen thy brethren". This was one of those many occasions when Peter, to quote the scribes and elders, "was with Jesus". This is what makes the failure of a Christian so different from those of other people in man's world. If a man made such a terrible blunder as Peter did in Pilate's hall, in today's society, he would never be trusted again. Certainly he would never be given a place of honour and authority. But it is not so when men and women are learning from the Lord Jesus. Peter had to learn a very painful, but necessary lesson. He thought he could stand up for Jesus in his own strength. We also have to learn that we can do nothing for the Lord Jesus in our own strength. If we try to do so, we may have to go through circumstances like Peter did, that we may learn how weak and useless we are, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Lord Jesus knew what Peter would do, but He had prayed for him. In Pilate's hall, He heard the denial but then looked upon Peter. That look broke Peter's heart and he went home and wept about it. The Lord Jesus, after His resurrection went to Peter. "The Lord hath appeared to Simon", the disciples said. We are not told what took place on that occasion, but we know the result; Peter was converted and restored, a changed man, through being with Jesus. There is no better place to learn hard lessons than in the presence of Jesus. If we do this, we will be changed people, whom the Lord Jesus can use in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such was Peter in the chapter we are reading.

In verses 13 to 15, Peter pressed on them the terrible mistake they had made. God's Son, Jesus, they had delivered up and denied. The Holy and the Just one, they had refused and asked for a murderer. The Prince of life, they had killed. They could not have been more wrong and guilty before God. Peter tells them, "Whom God hath raised from the dead". It was in the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that this man was made perfectly sound. They could not deny that, as he stood with the apostles. What a reversal of events had taken place! The soundness of the once lame man was a witness to the glory of Jesus in heaven.

But Peter not only brought conviction to them because of what they had done. He told them the way of escape that was now available to them. Repentance was necessary before their sin could be blotted out. This is always God's way of blessing for men. If we are to know the forgiveness of our sins, then we must repent of our sins, and then to cry to God for mercy. This is exactly what Peter tells them, but in a way that they would understand. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled".

Despite the fact that, earlier, Peter had accused them of killing the Prince of Life, he now offers them a way of escape, as he knew they had done it in ignorance. We may wonder how this could be. But remember the first words of the Lord Jesus after He had been crucified, were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". In Numbers 35, the LORD spoke to Moses and told him to provide cities of refuge, "that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares". We make a difference, even in our land, between murder and manslaughter. Here Peter tells them that God would treat what they had done as manslaughter, if they repented.

How marvellous was the love of God expressed in that prayer of the Lord Jesus for their forgiveness. Despite what they had done to Him, such was His love that He prayed for their forgiveness. Here we see that prayer being answered as Peter explains to them that God knew what they would do as His prophets of old had prophesied. The dreadful act that they had committed was now the righteous basis whereby He could righteously forgive their sins.

This is typical of God's love. We often illustrate this. The very point of the spear that pierced the side of the Lord Jesus when hanging dead on the cross, may well have been an action of hatred and brutality. But it also caused His precious blood to pour forth, and it is the blood of Jesus Christ which alone can cleanse from sin. our sin, hatred and brutality, Satan's power and death itself, were all overcome by the love of God, when Jesus died for us at Calvary.

At the beginning of chapter 4 the Sadducees and the priests, who were of that party, were outraged by Peter's preaching as it was based on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The way of escape that Peter offered them was completely rejected by them and so the apostles were arrested and brought before the council. Happily, not everyone was like these Sadducees and priests. Verse 4 says, "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand".

Such was the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Within a few days, and two preachings, over 8,000 people had been saved! Even when the Lord Jesus was alive on earth, never do we read of so many believing. Here, the greater works of the Holy Spirit through the apostles bring about a great harvest for God. But we can be sure that when the Lord is working, then the power of Satan will work as well. This is seen in the persecution of the apostles by the leaders of the nation. They bring the apostles, together with the man who had been healed, and they ask the question, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, answers them in verse 10, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved".

Peter here quotes from Psalm 118, but he changes it slightly. Instead of saying, "The stone which the builders refused", he adds in a word: "The stone which was set at nought of YOU builders" in crucifying the Lord Jesus, they had fulfilled this scripture. The word for 'set at nought' literally means, 'cast aside as worthless'. The Lord Jesus did not fit in to what these men were building. He was of a different character altogether, so they cast Him aside as of no value in their estimation. But God had made this stone the headstone of the corner. This was the stone which in Greek architecture gave character to the whole building.

4:13- 22 show strikingly how Peter's testimony was vindicated. The apostles were unlearned and ignorant by worldly standards, yet they had been with Jesus and were bold. This impressed the council, who would have liked to condemn them, but they could not. They could say nothing against it the healed man was there for them all to see. So they had to confess that they could not deny it, and they found no reason why they could punish Peter and John. They could only command them not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus.

But Peter knew that there was no other name under heaven whereby men could be saved. He had been commissioned by the Lord to preach this gospel. Not for any moment was there any question of him keeping quiet about Jesus. He says in 4:19-20, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard".

The Jewish council and Satan thought they had got rid of Jesus Christ of Nazareth forever. But the Holy Spirit of God had come down into the hearts and lives of those men who had been with Him. So Psalm 45:17 says, "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever". May we today prove that same power of the name of Jesus in our lives.

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