

The Unfolding | A Journey Through Acts

Week 4: A Miracle In The Shadow Of The Temple

Text: Acts 2:46-3:10

September 28, 2014

Pray [Me]

Scripture Reading [Bekka F.]: Acts 2:46-3:10

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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.

The New Temple Up & Running

Sometime shortly after the day of Pentecost, we see Peter and John on their way to the Temple to pray, which would have been about 3:00 in the afternoon. Recall the phenomena that took place among the 120 in the Upper Room on Pentecost: a mighty

rushing wind filled the room, signifying that the Spirit had come upon people in a way that was unprecedented in human history. And as a result of his presence and work among them, the small group of gathered believers began to praise God with supernatural fluency in languages from the far reaches of the Roman Empire - parts of Europe, Asia, and North Africa. But there was one particular phenomenon that I'd like us to recall together: the **flames of fire** that sat atop each of the heads of the 120 believers that morning. And as I mentioned in previous weeks, this is unmistakably the sign that the presence of Yahweh himself is active among them, blessing them. But this is no general sign of his presence. This flame resting on the heads of these ordinary believers, yet not harming them, is irresistibly reminiscent of the **burning bush** that captured the gaze of Moses way back in **Exodus 3:5** when God told him that he was standing on holy ground.

“Let My People Go”

The entire reason why God appeared to Moses at the burning bush wasn't for Moses' benefit alone. Yes, Moses experienced the presence of God himself. And he was never the same. Yet God specifically appeared to him in this way to show him that though he is a consuming fire, **those who live under his rule will not be consumed**. More specifically, God heard the cries of the **Israelites in bondage** and fully intended to rescue them. God wanted them to know their God-given identity as his own special people - a nation of slaves, yet totally unaware that they are a royal family. And **Moses was God's instrument** to accomplish this.

Moses was **incredulous**. He said something in Exodus 3:11 that we probably would have said if we were standing in his shoes (of course, Moses wasn't wearing shoes at this point!): *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”* On top of that, Moses didn't even know who was talking to him! How was he going to walk into Pharaoh's court - a man who was considered to be a god - androgen announce that another **nameless, faceless God** sent Moses to deliver to him a message? So God told Moses that his name is **Yahweh**. Then he told Moses to

remind the captive Israelites that he is no stranger to them, that he is the God of their *“fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”* (Exodus 3:15).

So before we move on, let’s remember two important ideas here:

1. God appeared to Moses to appoint Moses (which is a pattern in Scripture);
 - God appeared to **Adam** to appoint Adam to cultivate the earth and fill it;
 - God appeared to **Abraham** to appoint him to father a family that will bless all the other families of the earth;
 - God appeared to **Isaiah** (though he only saw the train of God’s robe, which filled the entire Temple) to appoint Isaiah to warn God’s people about their hard hearts;
 - God appeared to **Ezekiel** on his mighty throne in the midst of a firestorm, reassuring him that though he and the Jews are entering captivity, God has not abandoned them. Ezekiel’s message serves this purpose;
 - God appeared to **Paul** to appoint Paul to carry his gospel to the Gentiles;
 - God appeared to **John** to appoint John to deliver a message of perseverance to the seven churches in Revelation.
 - **Peter** knows that God’s appearance to the church in Acts 2 was to appoint the church to be witnesses.
2. Moses was appointed to rescue his captive people.

“Times of Refreshing”

Back to our story in Acts 3. After the lame beggar was healed, the people gasped in surprise. This man had been physically disabled since his birth 40-years earlier! Beginning in verse 11, the people (and there were many passers-by on their way to prayer that afternoon at the Temple) gathered around Peter for some explanation and to get a closer look at the healed man. (This was a fitting place, by the way, for a beggar to position himself since **giving alms** to the poor was one of the three major pillars of Judaism. Pious worshipers on their way to the Temple would naturally have been more motivated to give him charity.) What explanation could there be for this healing? Peter’s response is stunning in verses 12-20. Ponder these verses with me:

*And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? **13** The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.*

For many of us, the phrase, “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” is simply an embellished way of saying, “God.” But Peter was here quoting God himself in Exodus 3. Peter isn’t quoting this for effect. He literally views himself, along with the rest of the church, as **Moses-like messengers to the Jews** - people to whom God has appeared and appointed. Peter sees these people as no better off than their ancestors who were forced, on pain of death, to make bricks for the Egyptians out of mud and straw and who were oblivious to the identity of their Creator.

***14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.*

In Exodus 3, God gives his name to Moses: **Yahweh**. In Acts 3, Peter tells the Jews the another name by which God has revealed himself: **Jesus**. And how do we know that Jesus is Yahweh? Because by the name of Jesus, the apostles carried out many wonders and signs, this healing of a begging man being one of them.

***17** “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...*

Remember what repentance means, gang. (We covered this on week one and two of this series.) Repentance does not mean to merely tell God you’re sorry for your bad behavior. Repentance is the intentional act of rejecting your ways and embarking on

the lifelong enterprise of learning the ways of Jesus. We are all lifelong repenters. As we said last week, we are learning to pull away from the influence of this world and live skillful godly lives. This intentionality requires **strategy**. One of the most common questions I receive is in regards to **how someone changes**. I'll never forget what I heard a preacher say one time about changing. He said **"if you want to change, you've got to go through some changes."** Ponder this - Imagine what your life would look like in just one year if you did the following things without fail:

1. You came to our Sunday gathering each week; you arrive early and don't sneak out;
2. And when you're here, you're hospitable and meet people, have some conversations; you sit with other worshipping people;
3. You worship during the music; listen closely during the message; participate reverently during communion;
4. Got involved in one of our Missional Communities; attended it regularly.

I'll tell you what would happen: **you will change**. We often look at the transforming power of the Spirit in the Upper Room back on the day of Pentecost, but we forget that these people gathered regularly and the Spirit infused those gatherings. Times of refreshing are waiting for you if you just step out...

Speaking of **times of refreshing** by the presence of the Lord, keep in mind that these people are on their way into the Temple, the "presence of God." Yet, Peter suggests that they're essentially going the wrong direction. If you want the refreshing presence of the Lord, turn to Jesus! Repent! Now when you read the word, "refreshing," read **"cleansing."** Keep in mind that 3:00 was *"the time of the afternoon sacrifice which was accompanied by prayer by the congregation."*¹ Of chief concern to these people is their cleansing, or refreshing; being made right with God. To embrace the one and only sacrificial Lamb, Jesus, as king, correlates into eternal cleansing and refreshing! This is why we are all lifelong repenters!

¹ Marshall, I. Howard. Acts. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. 87.

Conclusion: Story Implications

- Contrast: This brings us back to the flames of fire atop the heads of Jesus' followers. The church is now the burning bush that is not consumed. They are now the resting place of the presence of God. The church, as my buddy, Robbyn Abedi, said when he preached here back in July, is the best chance people have of bumping into the presence of God. The irony is that, up until this point, the Temple had been that place for a thousand years. Yet, this **Temple was impotent** to restore one, solitary broken soul. So while the priests are busy inside prepping for a liturgical worship service, the apostles are raising up this lame man into perfect health. Herod's Temple. Awe-inspiring, ornate, and with no expense spared, is **made obsolete by anointed, appointed ordinary believers**.
- Team Ministry: Notice that both Peter and John entered the Temple court. They went together. It's almost impossible to resist the urge to recall Jesus sending out his disciples two-by-two to preach the gospel from town to town. Remember Ron's short series he preached on the last two weeks of June. It was called, "**All Hands On The Net.**" The idea was that the first time Jesus saw his disciples, he indicated his ultimate goal for them by saying he was going to turn them into "**fishers of men.**"² When we think of fishing, we think of a solitary person flinging a fishing pole. Back then, they didn't fish that way. They used large nets that were maneuvered by a **group of men together**. From the time I was a kid and throughout much of my adult life, I - like many of you - felt totally **inadequate in sharing the gospel** with people, evangelism, and witnessing. But what if we paired up our members to live on mission together like Peter and John did in this text? What if we built **teams of indigenous missionaries**? As Ron said so succinctly in that series, you can do it alone, but we're Better together. This is one of the biggest reasons why we want you to be a part of a Missional Community. We want each of our members to know what it's like to fulfill Jesus' commission to make disciples.
- Looking Intently: Finally, I'd like to challenge us all - including myself. The Scriptures say that **Peter and John directed their gaze on the crippled beggar**. They didn't walk

² Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17.

by awkwardly looking away. They stared at him, into him. If we are going to be the kinds of people who are used by the Spirit to bring about healing to our broken world, we are going to start having to look closer at pain. We're going to have to look intently into the eyes of those who suffer. I'll never forget a message Bill Hybels preached a few years ago about discovering your calling or your destiny. He said that You can find your calling where your gifts intersect with the brokenness of this world. Then he went on to warn his listeners with words that went something like this, "But you're going to have to dive into the pain of this world. You can't look away any more. You've got to experience it. Taste it. Smell it. Feel it. Only then will you know your holy calling."

Prayer