

Roy's sermon for 18/10/2020

Acts 3:11-16 'A Cripple set free part 2: In Jesus' Name!'

Last time in our walk through Peter's life with Jesus we began our look at the account of Peter's healing of the beggar who had been "crippled from birth". It was Acts 3:1-10 'A Cripple Set Free Part one; Jesus Takes Us By The Hand!' We learned that for at least 30 years "every day" this man had been carried to "the temple gate called beautiful." He was placed here to beg from the people coming and going from praise and worship. And to understand its powerful message, I said we needed to take ourselves back in time 2000 years. No disability pension, no treatment and no external aids of help. I explained that the pictures which leap out at us from the account are not only of the total physical bondage which this man had lived in for 40 years, but also the clear picture of our own absolute helplessness and inability to do anything about our spiritual paralysis, until Jesus takes us by the hand, through His blood on that cross!

We saw firstly, that being Jews, Peter and John continue to go to God's temple to worship. Just because we've become Christian doesn't mean that God wants us to separate ourselves from our past, if it is not opposed to Him. "Be in the world but not of the world" He tells us. He uses all of who we are for His glory! Yes, "crippled from birth" the nameless man had been begging for around 30 years conservatively speaking, 10,950 days I explained. Begging "every day" at the temple gate as God's people and life had passed him by. At the mercy (or lack there- of) of total strangers! Head down and hands out, until Peter says "look at us. Silver and gold have I none but what I do have I give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk." So God's Spirit, having already placed the seed of faith in this man's heart, he reaches out and Peter takes him by the hand. And yet it not only Peter, but Jesus, who takes him by the hand!

Yes this is who we all are. Dead in our slavery to sin and spiritual paralysis. We can't lift ourselves out of it, we can't change our condition, until Jesus comes to us in His mercy and takes us by the hand, through His blood on that cross!

This is where we pick up the text this morning. 'Acts chapter 3:11-16 A Cripple Set Free Part 2: In Jesus' Name!' In verses 8 to 10 the man jumps to his feet and goes straight into the temple courts praising God. Everyone recognises him as the beggar from the gate; they are "filled with wonder and amazement." Then in verse 11 "while the beggar held onto Peter and John, all the people came running to them." May I respectfully suggest that the emphasis be placed on the "to them." Friends, what we have before us here as we will see, is human nature revealed in its fallen state. What I mean is, since Adam and Eve, mankind is predisposed to lifting up the creation, while forgetting and casting aside the Creator, God!

Brothers and sisters, one of the great idols of the world today, (and I daresay has been since the fall), is the worship of the world that God has created, while casting aside The Creator. David Attenborough without doubt, is one of the parts of that great Idol of the world today. Just think of the worldwide influence which he has had by way of his evolutionary ideas and theories, which the world has embraced while completely abandoning the biblical truth about God as its' Creator. So what am I getting at? Well it's simply this. The Jews within the temple courts of God, (remember who they were and why they were there) v1 "at the time of prayer" who should have attributed this

amazing healing, even this miracle, to the Almighty God, (which the beggar himself was doing) we are actually looking to the men, as though they had some kind of mysterious miraculous power!

Now why do I make this leap? Well look at verse 12 “when Peter saw this he said to them, “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” You see, he realises what they are doing, and it is very much along the lines of what would go on to happen in Acts chapter 14 when Paul would heal another cripple. Verse 11 from Acts 14: “when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lyconian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form, Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.”

Now at least in this instance they were Pagan people worshipping Pagan gods. So for them to exalt the men as gods was indeed a natural reaction, so to speak. But in Peter and John's deliverance of the crippled beggar from the temple gate, they were now standing in the temple of God's own courts, surrounded by Jews, at the time of prayer. And yet their Jewish brethren want to exalt and lift them up and not God. This is what I mean by saying we see mankind's nature before us here, in its fallen state. The exaltation of the creation above its Creator, (whether it be the whales, the elephants, the birds, the sun, the moon, the stars, or mankind itself), is now what all of mankind is predisposed to do. And sadly, we see the overwhelming evidence of this all around us, indeed all around the world today!

It is as though Peter throws his arms up and yells at them ‘woah, hang on there.’ Again, v12b: “men of Israel why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” We are not gods, he is saying. We have no power to heal or deliver! And you know, that is very interesting because there are many around today who are indeed, in effect, claiming to have those powers which Paul is saying that neither he nor John possess! Swinging balls of smoke, or coats around their heads like Cowboys; claiming this or that supposedly in Jesus` Name. I've mentioned them many times before by name, you know who they are. There are many of them. They fly in their private jets and live in their multimillion dollar mansions, while always having their hands out for their followers to give. But again, when Peter realises what's happening he says ‘woah, hang on there! You have got it all wrong: we are not gods, we haven` t claimed to be gods and we don't claim to be gods. “Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us?”

Now the “why do you stare at us” I have just dealt with, but the “why does this surprise you?” I again find interesting. According to Matthew Henry, the great Bible commentator, Peter is saying in the face of all of the overwhelming evidence of who Jesus was and is. Yes, in the face of His miracles, which were seen and attested to by an abundance of eyewitnesses. He stilled the seas, He fed thousands with very little, He healed the sick, He drove demons out of people, He raised Lazarus from the dead to life. Yet far greater than all of those things, He Himself was crucified upon a cross, was sealed in a tomb, but defeated sin and death`s bondage by rising to life again, appearing to over 500 witnesses at one time. So, “why does this surprise you?” For the son of God our Saviour, this is but a very small thing, Peter is telling them. And let's attribute credit where credit is due, he is also telling them. “Why do you stare at us?”

Brothers and sisters, these men were now primed to hear the gospel. Their misconceptions of having power in their own, or indeed any other man's hands in the things which really matter, had been stripped away. So yes now they were ready to hear the gospel! And as we saw some weeks ago, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is yes about love but it is also a warning. So now what Peter again does, is what he did on the day of Pentecost in that sermon. He lays the blame for the death of the promised Messiah down at his hearers` feet. By giving them a biblically inspired historical lesson. V13-15 “The

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.” Yes, Peter lays the blame for Jesus` death, (as he did on the day of Pentecost), down at the feet of his hearers. Those Jews in the courts of the temple of God, “at the time of prayer”. And you know it really struck me when I was preparing this message, that if Peter felt the need in his first two major sermons since Jesus` ascension into heaven, to ensure that those who assumed to be God's people simply because they were descended from Abraham in the flesh, were indeed responsible for His Own Son's death, then it must be important for us also to take ownership of Jesus` Cross!

And beloved, let's again remember the setting. In the temple courts, “at the time of prayer”, a great miracle had taken place. The evidence before the Jews stands “praising God”, and yet they want to lift up Peter and John. ‘You've got it all wrong’, Peter says, ‘this is all about the One whom you put to death!’ I was reminded by Darlene when preparing this message that these were heavy and confronting things. As he aims (verse 13-15) at them with the accuracy of a trained sniper with a scoped rifle! Firstly he boldly declares the God of whom he speaks. This was not some foreign or unknown God. Verse 13: “the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob.” Now I'm sure he has their attention. “The God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus”. Yes, immediately Peter points to Him who deserves the praise and the honour, Jesus. Again, it's as though he was saying ‘hey, don't look at us. There is no power in our hands, it all comes from Jesus!’

Now brothers and sisters, there is an important lesson here for us to learn, because there is a trap here before us which is very easy to fall into. And it similar to that which I mentioned earlier, but slightly more specific. Before I mentioned the danger of lifting the creation up above the Creator. Well here it is: lifting the man up above the message. You see there is always a real danger of having favourite, or ‘pinup boy’ preachers. And Peter's words and actions really warn us against such things here. You all know that I could listen to Peter Marshall preaching every week for the rest of my life. But although I do love Peter`s preaching, the main reason I love it so much, (apart from the power of the truth which he preaches) is that I also know the man, and that he lives what he preaches! Pete`s goal is not praise or adoration, he just wants to remain faithful to God's truth. So we just need to be aware of not lifting the man up above the message. The man is simply a servant, and the message is that which saves men and women and children's souls for eternity!

Well Peter continues his gospel presentation and he doesn't miss them. Verse 13b: “You handed Him over to be killed and you disowned Him before Pilate, though he had decided to let Him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life.” Yes, “you handed Him over.” “You disowned Him.” “You disowned Him.” “You killed The author of life.” Friends, there is no gentle or easy way to present these words. “You handed Him over.” “You disowned Him.” “You disowned Him.” “You killed the author of life”.

Brothers and sisters can you see? *This is the gospel message*. Now yes it is only a part of the gospel message and yet it is a crucial part. And again can you see? We are not innocent bystanders when it comes to Jesus` death! And I do say these following things with all sensitivity. Though it is extremely hard to hear, according to Peter, it is as though we beat the Lord Jesus, “beyond the semblance of humanity” the Bible tells us. We forced the Crown of thorns down upon His head. We drove the nails into His Hands and Feet. We called out from the crowd “save yourself save yourself”, we thrust the spear into His Side and we cried out “crucify, crucify.” Yes dear friends, if we are to understand the message of the gospel clearly, we need to place ourselves in the “temple courts” standing before

both Peter and John as Peter preaches his sermon. We need to hear the words for ourselves “you handed him over”, “You disowned him”, “You disowned him”, “You killed the author of life”.

Brothers and sisters, as I said some weeks ago, there is the suggestion that we shouldn't do or say anything during worship which might offend people. Now, although *we of ourselves* shouldn't offend them, *if the gospel does*, praise God! How could anyone not be offended when these words are spoken to them? It offends our self-sufficiency and it offends the natural man. It offends us to be told that we are guilty of another man's death, indeed an innocent man's death. And it offends us when we are told that we are going to hell because of it. Yet as I have said before, better for them to be offended now while the door of Grace is still open, than to be offended at the gates of hell!

And brothers and sisters, as Matthew Henry explains, Peter understood personally everything he was talking about. Do you remember Jesus' own words to him the night He was betrayed, after Peter's declaration, of 'till death us do part' devotion? “I tell you the truth that before the rooster crows you will deny me three times.” Yes, Peter knew what it was to “deny” or “disown” the Lord Jesus. Of the Lord's own inner circle of friends. Having walked on water. And made declarations revealed by the Holy Spirit of Jesus' origin. Sworn his undying devotion and cut off the ear of one of those who came to arrest Jesus! But he then called curses down upon his own head, if he did indeed know this Jesus, this Nazarene!

Yes beloved, these are heavy things; these are difficult things to be confronted with. And I have no doubt that Peter's words cut his own heart to the core, as he was reminded of his own betrayals and denials as he spoke these things to the crowd. But the apostle's goal is not to cut the people down into despair and guilt, and leave them without hope, no. That's what Satan does. That's what he did with Job and that's what he does with us. He reminds us of our failures. He reminds us of our own disowning's of Jesus. There's moments when we have remained silent, when we should have spoken out in our Saviour's Name. Yes those moments when like Peter, we were ashamed to own our Lord. Because we don't want the stigma and we don't want the ridicule. We just want to blend in with the crowd. Peter understood all of this. He was warming his hands around the fires of the soldiers, while Jesus was on trial! Yes he understood passion and frailty. And more importantly, so does our Lord.

Yes we do need to be confronted with our guilt and responsibility of Jesus' death. True repentance takes ownership of those things. But the goal of the preaching of Christ's gospel is not to leave men and women and children in the depths of despair and without hope, as though Jesus still lay dead in the grave, no. Again, verse 15 “You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”

Yes dear friends the message of the gospel is the message of hope. 1 Peter 1:3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” The message of the gospel does bring condemnation and judgement for all of those who do not take ownership of Jesus Christ. But for those of us who are “being saved” it is the message of hope. Jesus is “the author of life.” All life flows from Him. Both the mortal for this world, and the immortal for the next. Yes, Peter is telling us that as surely as Jesus has risen from the dead, (of which both he and John are witnesses), this man that you now see before you who was the cripple which you knew; has received his new life through Jesus, not us! It is in Jesus' Name that this man has been healed. Verse 16 “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' Name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.”

Dear friends, moments of doubt, moments of even being ashamed of Jesus and His gospel may come. But as surely as we have the evidence before us in the restored legs and life of this man, (Peter is saying), be assured of this: Jesus Reigns now!

And as I close this morning, I'd like quickly to refer you to Jesus healing of the cripple at the pool of Bethesda recorded in John chapter 5. Look it up for yourselves at home. The accounts are not too dissimilar. A crippled man, bound in the bondage of his disability. A healing occurs, and then the religious elite seek to attack the healer. And yet there is one eternal difference. Do you know what it is? Peter heals in Jesus` Name, Jesus heals in His own name! Yes Peter heals in the name of Him who has bestowed that power upon him. But Jesus heals with His Own Power, because all life comes from within him!

Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved."

O Beloved, we live, we stand, we breathe and we go, only in Jesus` Name. Praise God. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Let`s Pray!