

Waking the Sleeping Giant - 16

A Healing Touch

Acts 3:1-8 *“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 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. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So, the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.*

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.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”

I like the story of the arrogant, prideful lion, who wanted to remind other animals how great he was. He went to the gazelle and roared, *“Who is the king of the jungle?”* Trembling, the gazelle answered, *“Why, you are, mighty lion.”* He went next to the giraffe and roared, *“Who is the king of the jungle?”* Fearful, the giraffe answered, *“Why, you are, mighty lion.”* Next, he went to the monkey and roared, *“Who is the king of the jungle?”* Startled, the monkey answered, *“Why, you are mighty lion.”* Finally, he went to the elephant and roared, *“Who is the king of the jungle?”* The elephant reached out and grabbed the lion with his trunk, slammed the lion to the ground several times, and flung him at last into a large boulder. As the lion lay there he said to the elephant, *“Just because you didn’t know the answer, you didn’t have to take it so personally.”*

Power is one of the most sought-after prizes in life. But when people get it, often the results are not that positive. Power tends to corrupt both the people who have it and the people who feel its effect. Often people use power to abuse, belittle, subdue, conquer, and even destroy others. In the process, they find that they become people that no one likes, miserable people, corrupted from the inside out. Power has a decidedly negative side. But it can have a positive impact as well.

On that wonderful Day of Pentecost we read about in Acts 2, power from heaven came down. The power of God turned despairing doubters into dynamic disciples. They had received the promised Holy Spirit and were clothed with power from on high. But power for what? Did they receive the power of God simply so they could feel good about themselves? Did they receive the power of God to keep it to themselves? No! They received the power of God to energise them to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in a secular society. The power of Pentecost was for people; to enable the disciples to reach out and touch human need and share the liberating truth of the Gospel of Christ. The power of Pentecost is for the paralysis of the world. It’s all about caring for people.

The power of the Spirit is not given so we turn inward and become exclusive as we enjoy the company of other Spirit-filled people. Unfortunately, many who have experienced a personal Pentecost in their own lives have established little, exclusive societies, complete with its own sub-culture and jargon.

The questions, "*Are you charismatic?*" or "*Have you been filled with the Spirit?*" are often the critical questions. But those are really not the important questions. The questions should be: "*Has the Spirit's filling given you a ministry?*" "*How has the power of God enabled you to reach out to others?*" "*How have the gifts of the Spirit enabled you to communicate the Gospel of Christ to human hearts?*" Pentecost is for the sake of the world. We must never be content to sing "*Standing on the Promises*" while all we're doing is sitting in the premises. Pentecost is to enable us to reach out and touch others.

But how do you share the Gospel with people in an upwardly mobile, secular society, especially those who appear to be self-sufficient? Doesn't it seem easier to share the Gospel with people who seem to be in desperate need - someone who has hit bottom, a wretched sinner who has nowhere to turn, who's flat on his back? It seems easier to share with that kind of person than those who live in our neighbourhood, who are upwardly mobile and affluent, who seem to have everything they need. The kind of people I'm speaking of all have nice houses, manicured lawns, at least two nice cars, fine clothes, children who are doing well in school, great jobs, and plenty of money. What more could they need?

The truth is, things are not always what they seem. The down-and-out and the up-and-out have at least two things in common: They are both human and they both have deep needs. Inside every one of those nice houses sitting on their manicured lawns are people who hurt, people who have unmet personal needs. Many of those people have their own story of human tragedy which they could tell, and every one of them needs a touch from God.

In our text today, we see the power of God healing a human life. We see people who have been touched by the power of God touching others. It is the story of the lame man who begged by the gate called Beautiful. In this passage we see a real example of the power of God to heal. This man was healed physically, but the message of this text is not limited to physical healing in any way. This passage deals with human transformation. Here, we will find valuable lessons which I pray will motivate us to find opportunities to minister to hurting people.

What we see before us is a human tragedy. Notice first the misfortune of the man. The Scripture tells us that this man was crippled. But more than that, this man was crippled from birth. Think about the tragedy of that for a minute. He had never been able to stand and walk, to run and play like the other boys. His parents had to carry him everywhere. I'm sure so many opportunities were denied him because of his affliction. Now, he's a grown man and every day friends must carry him to the Temple so he can beg for a living. A tragic situation indeed. We can only speculate concerning what effect this must have had on his heart. He could easily have been bitter. There had never been a day in his life when he had not been a burden to somebody. He could not walk; he could not work. All he could do was beg, sit there, and hope that people would have pity on him.

What we see here is a picture of human tragedy. This man symbolises for us the reality of tragedy in life. As we look at him, we are reminded of the fact that everywhere we look there is human hurt, human suffering, and human tragedy. Sometimes it manifests itself through a physical affliction such as this man had, but more often it goes unseen to human eyes.

For everyone who is crippled physically, there are thousands who are crippled emotionally - and there are hundreds of thousands who are crippled spiritually. The message of this man is that there are needs to be met in human lives everywhere. And those needs also exist in lives that are outwardly wonderful.

This lame man sat and begged at the gate called "Beautiful." From historical accounts, we know that this gate was indeed an impressive sight. Much of it was made from Corinthian bronze. It was inlaid with ornately decorated gold. As the sun would shine upon it, its glistening brightness could be seen for miles. Yet, sitting under its magnificent beauty was a pathetic, suffering human being.

How many of our co-workers or friends or neighbours appear outwardly to be doing OK, yet inwardly they are struggling? They are over-extended financially. They don't know what to do with their children. Their marriages are falling apart. Their job is hanging by a thread. They've lost all self-esteem. They're guilty and depressed and don't know where to turn. Behind every door there is human need. Every person has a story to tell. We've all been hurt, we've all been used, we've all failed, and we all need healing. We need Jesus - and that's the biggest need that anyone has. People need a heavenly touch from God.

What this man needed, indeed, what all people need is a heavenly touch from God. He needed the power of Pentecost to be made available to him. But how was he going to get it? Every day he came to the Temple. Every day he sat and begged. He wasn't in the group at Pentecost. He didn't know what was going on. He lived his life out of the mainstream. He was oblivious to the good news of God. He couldn't get to Church, and I'm not sure he would have gone if he could. Why should he go? What was there for him?

Unfortunately, this is the attitude of many people today. They hurt, but they hurt in silence, not being willing to share their intimate hurts with anyone else. The church is the last place they want to go. Many of them view the Church as a judgmental society of self-righteous hypocrites anyway. But even if they have a good view of the Church, there's not much to motivate them to drag their tired bones out of bed on a Sunday morning in order to come alone to one of its services. This crippled man may have been like that. Who would bring him a heavenly touch?

Jesus had ascended into heaven but He sent the Holy Spirit to empower his people so they could be His messengers. And here we find two such messengers: Peter and John. What an unlikely pair, Peter and John. Normally it was Peter and Andrew, and James and John. That's how they are usually paired in the Gospels. Peter and John were so different naturally, but Christ had brought them together. Their friendship had turned into fellowship and they were now Christ's messengers.

So, we find these messengers coming to the Temple at the ninth hour, which was three in the afternoon, to pray. On their way, they encountered this crippled man begging for money. He had been there every day. No doubt they had seen him before. In fact, he was probably there when Jesus passed by. But Jesus had not healed him. Strange? Perhaps. We don't know why. Undoubtedly, God had His reasons. It could have been that God wanted to use this man as an illustration of His grace at this time. As Peter and John were going in, he began to ask them for money and they stopped.

Look at the motivation of these messengers. They saw in this man an opportunity to minister the touch of God. Their lives had been turned around by Jesus and now they wanted to share what they had received. That was their motivation. And because of that, they weren't in a hurry. They had time for people. After all, Jesus always did. In the midst of His busy schedule, He always had time for the individual. His motivation for ministry was people and so was theirs now.

What was the ministry of these messengers? Their ministry was to bring a heavenly touch to a human tragedy. They stopped. They said to the man, "*Look at us.*" He looked at them thinking they would give him some money. And what they said next is interesting.

Then Peter said, *"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."* What the man wanted was money. But what he needed was healing. And so, Peter told him they didn't have what he wanted but they had what he needed. He wanted to fill his cup, but God wanted to fill his heart. He wanted a handout, but he was about to receive a hand up.

Verse 7 says, *"Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong."* Notice that Peter didn't just share about Christ. He reached out to do something for this man. The heavenly touch comes through human messengers, motivated by the love of God. If we are going to touch people with God's presence, we must be there where they are, reaching out to them, helping them in the way they need help.

But notice that they could only give this man what they had. Peter said, *"But what I have I give to you."* Peter could not give him silver and gold because he had none. He could only give what he had. So it is with us. If we do not possess a living relationship with Jesus Christ, we will never be able to impart a heavenly touch to others. You can only impart what you have. It is important that we take care to develop our own spiritual life if we would impart spiritual life to others.

We must be careful not to let the things of this world get in the way. There is an oft-told story of Thomas Aquinas when he visited Pope Innocent II and found him counting a large sum of money. *"Ah, Thomas,"* said the Pope, *"the church can no longer say, 'silver and gold have I none.'"* *"That is true, Your Holiness,"* said Aquinas, *"but then, neither can it now say, 'Arise and walk.'"*

These two disciples didn't have silver and gold, but they had the power of God. What we need is not possessions, but power: Power to touch people's lives with the presence of the living God; power to reach out to people and lift them up out of their tragic circumstances and give them hope and healing, friendship and fellowship. This was the ministry of these messengers and this is our ministry as well.

When a heavenly touch encounters a human tragedy, what results is a healing transformation. That is what occurred in the case of this lame man. A miracle happened to him. Let's look at the manifestation of that miracle.

Verse 8 says, *"He jumped to his feet and began to walk."* When Peter took him by the hand, something happened. Peter was not content with merely sharing with him. He reached out in a physical way to encourage this man to take a step of faith. Sometimes we have to do that for others. We have to resort to action to encourage them to take a step toward Jesus. When Peter did this, the man was healed. His need was met. His legs were strengthened. He stood to his feet. He was made whole. He took a step of faith because Peter and John had taken a step of faith. And Jesus met them there.

There was a metamorphosis as a result of this miracle. The man was completely changed. Not only was he healed, but joy flooded his soul. The Scripture says, *"Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."* Because someone cared enough to reach out to him in the name of Jesus, his life had been totally transformed.

What did this mean to him? It meant now that he could walk. It meant that he could work. It meant that he could live a full life. But it meant more than that - much more. It meant that somebody cared. It meant that God loved him. Now he could live in communion with God every day. He had been healed in more ways than one. How could he help but rejoice? And that is precisely what he did. He was walking and leaping and praising God. I'd say he was excited. And so should we be.

It's OK to be excited. There are thousands of lifeless saints sitting in Churches across the nation who think they are dignified when, really, they are petrified. They have lost their leap and they need to get it back and get excited like this guy was. That's what can happen to you when you encounter a touch from God. He can reach into our hearts and heal our human tragedy. He can liberate us and we can liberate others.

The real message to us here today is that we have been empowered for the sake of other people. There are needs all around us. There are needs right here in our fellowship. And there is nothing more important among God's priorities than people. All that we do is to share the healing power of God with human beings so they may be liberated to serve the living God.

Look around you each day in your circle of influence. See the needs. Ask yourself, "*What are the needs of this person and what can I do to minister to those needs?*" Of course, the goal is to lead people to Jesus. But we must first reach out to them in a way which touches their need. We must give them what we have - our time, our friendship, ourselves. As we do, their ears will be opened and their hearts receptive to hearing about the Good News - and when they receive that, like the man who was healed, they will be walking and leaping and praising God!

Are you with me here? Do you really believe that the same power which created this entire universe; the power which raised Jesus from the dead; the power which keeps the sun burning with life-giving energy 24 hours a day - is the power which is in you? If Christ is in you, then the greatest power in the universe is within you! There is not a single need known to mankind that cannot be met by the power of the living God - and you have that power!

And there are thousands of people surrounding us every day who need what we have. Will we take the time to share it with them? May God give us people to touch with the power of God.