

“...the (long) journey begins.”

- Acts 3 & 4 -

**by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Josh 8:35 *Every command Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among the Israelites.*

Deut 4:9 *"But watch out! Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the LORD do for you. Do not let these things escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren."*

Deut 6:6-7 *"And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again"*

It is a sad thing to watch really. Man forgetting so easily where he came from, ...the events that have passed, ...and the promises that were made. As the disciples ventured forth from that room that day of the Holy Spirit's entrance, each of them began both a corporate and an individual journey. Some would grow, mature, embrace the Spirit's leading and would change the world. Others would start out with a bang, but would drift away and cool in the passion of that brief emotional moment in the upper room.

Peter and John, now empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, seemed to go about their lives pretty much as they had before. They didn't "pack it in" for seminary training someplace, nor do we have record of them nailing a "pastor" plaque to an office door. Rather it seems they set off to practice their faith under the powerful, yet *natural presence and control* of God in Spirit.

Chapter 3 begins with the two of them setting off to go to prayer at the prescribed time just as they had no doubt done for years. I wonder if those words from the cross would now echo in their heads and hearts as they reached that exact same time of the day when the Lord had uttered, *"it is finished."* For it was the ninth hour ...and the ninth hour was set aside for prayer. A practice of faithfulness each day to communicate with the Creator. Such discipline makes a disciple. In fact, no *disciple* will be a reality without self-discipline motivated by one's love and passion.

Looking beyond the surface, one cannot help but wonder about these two guys hanging out together. Two men who couldn't be any more different, yet God inexplicably brought them together. Throughout the gospels, these two seemed to represent polar opposites. But it was Jesus who brought them together in friendship, and now the Holy Spirit had brought them together in *fellowship* and *mission*. Now their unity was going to be rewarded in the expression of miraculous power in their midst. Such is always the natural result of the harmony of fellowship within the body of Christ!

3:1-10



There at the temple entrance called Beautiful they found a man who had been lame all of his life. This gate was so called because of its sheer magnificent appearance. Made from the finest Corinthian bronze this gate was the entrance to the temple and the place where the religious folks believed that “God lived.” Yet the truth was *and is* that the doorway to God is not some gate made of bronze, but rather what was wholly represented by that “miracle-waiting-to-happen” sitting at that gate. Peter and John, full of the Holy Spirit, recognized what was *really* important.

This lame man was no doubt carried to the gate each day by well meaning friends so that he might spend his day begging. They had the best of intentions I’m sure! But that’s all that *men* had and have to offer: worldly social work. But *these* men, *Peter and John*, did not come with mere good intentions. They came with *God* and the *power of His Holy Spirit*. And truly, once God is in the mix, most anything can happen!

I’m sure that most people that passed by this man dealt with him as we do today when confronted with scenes of pain, weakness, and despair. It is likely that most people just walked on by, being careful not to make eye contact. Other’s dropped a few coins for him because they felt bad and “wanted to help” but didn’t know how nor did they devote any amount of time upon the concept.

Peter and John however *purposely* stopped and called this man’s attention to them. He thought he would receive the material blessings of men, but instead of seeing *mere men*, he met the Creator that day.

“*Look at us...*” said Peter, John, *and Jesus*.

It’s interesting how so many men and woman today are willing to give that “silver and gold” in similar situations, and be so very *unwilling* to do as Peter and John had done, to *reach out and make personal contact*. People will write a check to help the needy, but to touch and even *share* the need is quite another matter! To communicate and further, *interact* with that world is beyond the realm of imagination for many of us!

Peter and John, apparently a little short on cash, were unable to give financially, but they were willing and able to deliver the greater gift! At their hands, the power of God was manifested. They claimed no credit for what was going to occur nor did they after. It was in the name of Jesus Christ that such authority and power would be manifested.

The story has been told of how Thomas Aquinas visited the pope at a time when large sums of money were being counted. The pope boasted, “We need no longer say with Peter, ‘Silver and gold I do not have!’” Aquinas replied, “Neither can you say with Peter, ‘Rise up and walk!’”

This was a man who had never known the feeling of grass under his feet, or the pleasure of a walk in the park. Yet now he stood up for the first time in his life. He *walked*, he *leaped*, and, most of all, he *praised God*. Notice once again that Peter and John were not given the credit for this miracle, rather the Lord was! One naturally wonders why we do not witness such miraculous events on the streets of America today. Such healing is nearly commonplace in other countries, but in America we wholly live up to 2 Tim 3:5 that speaks of a people that have “*a form of godliness but deny its power*.” After all, we are very level headed and down to earth people. We don’t readily put our faith in things we cannot understand or explain, nor are we ready to believe in what we cannot see. So, *as the Lord has told us*, we often do not receive because we fail to ask, or we ask out of wrong motives.

Thus, the miraculous is rare here in the land of “in God we trust.” When we *do* seek Him to manifest Himself in power, we often attempt to back Him into a corner to perform as we see fit. But *faith* is seeking Him to manifest Himself as *He* sees fit.

This is the true result of the miraculous hand of God. A person truly touched by Christ will cause those of the world to stand in amazement and wonder. It is a strange thing to step back and view mankind in this light. The unique difference between *that* man and thousands of others is he, *no doubt*, was fully aware of his personal condition! Yet the reality today is that tens of thousands of humanity are actually as crippled as this man, albeit they are crippled *spiritually*. And that handicap affects every other aspect of their living! Sadly, they sit day after day scrounging for morsels of care and compassion that is tossed in their direction, all the while fail to just look up and acknowledge the presence of the only One who can heal them!

3:11-26

No one could deny that the miraculous had occurred in the life of this man. *But what did it mean? How did this happen?* As the people stood in amazement, Peter took the opportunity to explain and elaborate. In essence, this is what any good pastor/teacher does. It is what I desire every time I stand at the pulpit! To simply acknowledge and expound upon what it is that we read in the Word of God and what is happening in real time in our midst. To explain what it is that we see around us. The scriptural directives. The wonder of creation. The power of a life radically transformed. The healing of a soul!

“...*you asked for a murderer...you killed the Author of life.*” It might be that our response to these words would be an attitude of denial of any responsibility for such a travesty. No culpability here! It is so easy to remove ourselves from any blame for what went on there so long ago. What did we have to do with crucifying Jesus? When Peter says here “*you delivered up,*” we recoil saying “...*he didn't mean me! I wasn't even there!*” Yet the Bible says that *all* of us did indeed “*deny the Holy One,*” and many do it again and again every day! We have asked for the *murderer to be granted* to us. Satan the great deceiver. We want the evil over the gentle messiah.

Our Lord made it clear. Unless we have been born again, we will never see Him, for we never knew Him! Each one of us is ultimately guilty of killing the “Author of Life.” Our inherent sin, and our subsequent apathy *for* that state of sin, personally nailed Him to a cross so very long ago. Do not make the fatal error of somehow believing that you are without such sin. It is the greatest tool of Satan to convince us that we are somehow “out of the loop.” Telling us that we are generally good people, ultimately having nothing to do with the cross, or having anything in us that would call for anyone to die for our sins.

1 John 1:8-2:6... “*If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins — and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. If someone claims, “I know God,” but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.*”

It was faith in God that made this man strong. Oh, how we want to believe we are strong without God! However, in the depths of our soul, in the quiet of the night, we are troubled by the gnawing reality that we are

so very weak. We need only to look into that dark depth that is our mortal soul to know the truth. No man can beat it. Death awaits!

The local townspeople knew this man, and how busted up he was. Now God had given him a “*perfect health*” that was now staring them in the face. This man’s issues were on the surface for all to see. Some think that Jesus is for the likes of these: *drug addicts, alcoholics, social misfits, those in chronic need*. And this is true! People will tell you that they are happy for *you*...that you found religion and its peace. But it’s not “for them,” and they don’t want you to “preach to them.” Sadly, it is the one that can walk just fine but is in fact quite blind, *spiritually blind to his or her need*, that stands in the greatest danger! For it is *these* that are fooled into believing that they are okay in the sight of God. When in truth, we are all found broken at the gate of the temple, busted at the door of where God lives...

“*Repent...*” “*...be converted.*” Hmmm....It’s amazing how such simple small words can cause the bravest to shutter! God wants to bless us, and He has already done so on so many levels! He desires to have a relationship with His creation. How can that be too much to ask for what He has already given us? It certainly is not too much for what He *wants* to give us.

Chapter 4

For a time, this “baby” church experienced great fellowship and joy. They had experienced the “highs” of the upper room experience and had a new and fresh filling of the Spirit of God dwelling within them. They had been part of the miraculous healing hand of God. This was truly the good times. For the early church, these are the days we call “the honeymoon period.”

Inevitably, the trials and the persecution would come, just as surely as they have for this fellowship. Christ is the rock of offense, and those offended would certainly “come knocking.” (Rom 9:33, 1Pet 2:8) Chapter 4 opens the first period of testing. The foes of Christ had arrived. Peter had warmed himself by the fire, and now would be baptized with fire...

4:1-22

Sadducees were the people in power within the Jewish realm, and they were skeptics and pragmatists. They rejected the reality of the supernatural, and furthermore, anyone who taught otherwise. Therefore, because of such a stance, they also rejected the concept of the resurrection. They believed that only the books of Moses were legitimate, so the rest was ignored. These folks were the liberals of the day. They were the modern-thinkers, the “broad road” people. They accepted just about anybody's views and positions, except of course, *Christians*. Sound familiar?

These educated people were greatly disturbed by the actions of these unlearned fishermen. It’s funny how these little men, during their ministry, would generate such fear and near pandemonium. “Little men” have been shaking this world for Christ right up unto this present day.

Here we have the result of such attempts to crush the name and the followers of Jesus! We know today, from the far reaches of communist China to what once was “behind the iron curtain” in old Soviet block countries, to repressive countries such as India and Nepal, Christ continues to thrive. Persecution has always ultimately backfired on those who attempted to stop the spread of Christianity. There will always be the “culling of the herd”...just as we see today during hard times, but those who remain are stronger than before and they go on to thrive. Despite the apostles arrest, five thousand were saved that day. You can’t stop God...

The preaching of the cross is, and always has been, an offense to the senses of the Sadducees, whether it was in the days of the early church or amongst the modern Sadducees today. The cross continues to elicit both *salvation* for those who are willing to receive, and *rage* from those who will not!

We must remember that the Jewish world at this time was under Roman rule. The religious powers in Israel were operating within a strange and tenuous arrangement that provided a limited religious tolerance for those within this occupied territory. No doubt Rome felt that a little religion would keep these prisoners without walls in a state of calm.

However, this arrangement was far from perfect. The true High Priest Annas had by this time been removed from his position, probably because he was a security risk and his son-in-law Caiaphas was put in his place. The Jews worked through both, but they still held Annas as the true High Priest. All these men gathered together to hear what Peter and John had to say.

The healing of the lame man was an indisputable fact. No one could argue with the evidence. They had all seen him sitting at the gate day after day, and perhaps they had even given him some money from time to time. They clearly knew that he had been crippled, and they could see with their own eyes that he was no longer crippled. Yet these religious leaders were incredulous! “*by what power or by what name have you done this?*” Sort of a “how could such an act of God occurred, if *we* weren’t a part of it?” Ah, peoples pride! Here is the key to what happened next...

“Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Spirit* said...”

Peter begins now to preach again! It’s almost like he can’t help himself! In a way, I guess maybe he can’t! For the word used here is “filled.” It is a precise word, and, in its beautiful simplicity, describes the power with which Peter speaks.

Peter apparently didn’t come with any notes for this spontaneous church service, but he cuts loose anyway. He doesn’t waste any time getting to the point. He addresses these men specifically and fearlessly.

Luke 21:12-15 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist."

Take note of the context of Peter’s message! No deep theological apologetics, no arguing over denominational discrepancies; only *Jesus*, crucified, resurrected, and the singular path to salvation. Further, Peter gives credit where credit is due: not himself or John, but squarely upon Jesus Christ.

We must note that this bold declaration was given by the same man that earlier denied Jesus *three times* in one evening. How can that be? What changed? There is only one explanation! Peter was now filled by the very Spirit of God. Now it was no longer just Peter, but *Peter under God’s direct control*, that stepped up to the plate. He did not flinch when declaring that very narrow path. “*There is salvation in no other.*” This is a mark for us in a world that seeks the “broad road.” Mankind wants *options*, yet nowhere else do we see this kind of logic! If they found a cure for cancer, would we complain that there was only one?

Notice again that it was not Peter and John's overt educated philosophies that impressed them. This was not an expensive suit-wearing preacher with a Rolex and high hair! This was an uneducated Galilean fisherman that had only one thing going for him. *He had been with Jesus.* And they knew it! It was more than just what he said, it was the boldness in his proclamation. There was no longer any fear, for, "*perfect love had cast out all of his fear...*" (1 John 4:18) Those men present that day saw something in Peter and John that defied their senses. The bottom line was they could not argue with the evidence of the miraculous. This is the same with so many believers today. *They* are the evidence of the miraculous hand of God. Many of the people know and fear the reality that you "have been with Jesus."

Ironically, the only thing these men could do was tell Peter and John to shut up. What else could they do? I mean, everyone can *see* what these guys are doing and can *hear* what they are saying! They just needed to shut them down! Those angry guys are *still* out there. They are still trying to get you to be quiet.

Peter and John stood them down that day. They refused to back down in front of the same guys who had, a short time before, sent Jesus to the cross! Peter and John stared death in the face, and they wouldn't back down. There is no arguing the evidence. Oh, you can try, but there before all is the evidence that our God is real, powerful, and in control. They cannot debate or explain away what God has done in and to you! All you have to do is stand up for all to see. To see *the glory of God.*

4:23-37

The Holy Spirit swept into this group and empowered them to do *whatever they put their hand to.* It was not because they were anything special, for they were just *people* like you and I. It was because they *had* something special, they had *someone* special. They had the Holy Spirit and all that came with Him. This church was of *one heart and one soul.* They shared everything they had and everything they were. Through the unity of the Spirit, they exercised great power and experienced *great grace.*

These were the finest of times! They needed all the unity and strength they could find, for the battle would come. They would *need* that grace and power! Just like us, they would more than *want* the Holy Spirit, they would *need* the Holy Spirit. They were in this thing *together.* That is crucial! Those who attempted to fly solo wouldn't make it. The unity of the Spirit had to translate into the unity of the body.