

*Words and Deeds: What I Have I Give You*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*Psalm 30; Matthew 9:35-38; Acts 3:1-16*

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Acts 3:1-16. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer-- at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled 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 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. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 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? 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. 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.”

Have you ever gone back and read a book you loved for the third or fourth time to discover details you never noticed before? Sometimes, we become so familiar with something that we miss the particulars. Three weeks ago now, we got our new church signs that are in our lobby and our worship space. What amazed me was that several of us passed by them without even another look. I had to ask, “What do you think of the new signs?” And when people came back and took a better look, they were like, “Oh, wow, those are great!” But in the five months we've been here, things have become so normal, so expected, that we miss the change that's right in front of us. The same thing happens sometimes when someone in the family gets a haircut. I might notice something is different but I can't place my finger on it until they tell me.

Today's passage is about an extraordinary healing, the first one we read about since Jesus' death and resurrection. It's the first miracle performed by an apostle without Jesus' earthly, physical presence. The way it's told is in parallel with Jesus' miracles, too; the only difference is that whereas Jesus simply said the word and miracles happened, Peter does what he accomplishes in Jesus' name. As we look at this today, I want to look at some of the particulars that give us more insight into the early church and how the patterns of the early church should affect us today...and might give us a window into how the miraculous can occur today.

The first detail we easily miss is right in the first sentence. “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon.” Simple sentence, right? Nothing weird going on there at all. So what do we not know? What do we pass over?

The thing we miss is that Peter and John were together. Not surprising, right? They are friends; they were Jesus' disciples. But it says something deeper than we think. In fact, we're going to make it our first observation about this passage for our modern selves: *God's work and God's miracles happens most often when the church community is together.*

We all have to account for ourselves at judgment. Jesus will stand in the gap and cover the sins we committed if we have entrusted ourselves to Him, but we are responsible for ourselves. Yet what we so easily forget is that the biblical events and the Scriptures that record them didn't happen in North American ultra-individualism. They happened to groups of people. God chose a group of people, the Israelites, and He gives Jesus so that another group, the Gentile peoples, can come to Him as well. God uses individuals, but He gives us backup.

God gave Adam Eve because Adam needed backup. Moses does incredible miracles; yet his brother Aaron is right by his side for the vast majority of them, saying Moses' words to Pharaoh and participating alongside. David is given the companionship of Jonathan. Elijah gets incredibly fearful by himself, and eventually God gives him a counterpart in Elisha, who goes on to do even greater things than Elijah. Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs to minister throughout the countryside. Peter and John were inseparable for a time. Even when persecution scatters the early church, they work together in companionship. Saul goes on his mission with Barnabas and John Mark by his side; later he has Silas, Luke, and Timothy with him. Saul's saddest letter is maybe his second one to Timothy, written when he is in prison and he says that everyone has abandoned him – all but Luke.

Don't underestimate the power of two or three. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “Whenever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.” Someone this week wrote me about how they were inspired by last week's sermon to be the church out in the world, and how it worked for a little bit, but when the boss got cranky and the day got going, it felt almost impossible to be Christ-like.

And my first thought went back to what we learned last week. The early church was dedicated to four things – do you remember what they were? The apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. And how did they do those things? Together. When I got the email, I was like, “Yeah, it is really hard because we need the support of one another. We've got to do it together!” In the next few passages, Peter is the man in front; he's the one who the healing came through; he's the one who spoke. And yet John was there giving witness to it all, there to pray, there to be a friend, there to remind Peter that he is not alone.

I am convinced that every church needs really wise, godly people to stand up with their pastor because pastors can't do it alone. That's why we have both teaching elders and ruling elders in our church. We stand together; we are to be the support to one another so we can then support the congregation. I think having a spouse who loves Jesus and understands the ministry can be a great support to a pastor. If a pastor is single, they need that support too.

When we live our lives out in the world, we need a Christian friend at work; we need a Christian friend in our places we live and witness; we need to know that the church is with us, reminding us that Jesus and the Spirit are with us too. God has given us each other as a gift. Now I don't want to overemphasize this because it's a detail, not the point of the passage. But as we are thinking about how to be the church outside of a worship service, it's good to note as we see the apostles first in action.

The next thing we see in the passage is the beggar. His condition is so bad that someone has to bring him to the temple to beg. He's lame since birth, which is important because everyone knows he was genuinely healed and not just faking it. He was born with this awful condition. There's something even deeper between the lines, something not said here but would have been known to all the Jews who knew the Scriptures – this man has never entered into the true worship space of the temple. You didn't have to be perfect to enter the temple, but the lame and physically mangled and disfigured couldn't go in to the altar area, to the inner courts. This is as far as he got. His whole life, he has been cut off from the worship of God. Every day, he is brought out to beg, watching everyone else go in to worship, but he never does.

What interests me is how the man's begging plays out. Peter and John look straight at him, and they have to tell him to look at them. That's a little weird, right, a detail that's odd? Yet isn't this what begging is often like now? Nobody's looking at the man, and he's not making eye contact with anyone else. He's begging, “alms, alms,” probably saying it hundreds if not thousands of times a day, but not looking too closely, not making too much of a show, because that could get too uncomfortable; it might get him less in donations.

And the people coming by, too, they're just like we are, heading into the game or the post office, and we're embarrassed by the person asking for change. We might feel we should give them something, maybe food so they can't buy something harmful, who knows. Head down, hand out, here you go, clink in the can, walk by, head back up, no contact. **We know the drill.**

Yet that's not the way this is going to go down this time. Peter and John look right at him. They tell him to look at them, so he does. He expects to receive something from them. And yet here's the little missing link: *God does miracles most often when we are unafraid of making human contact and dealing with problems dead in the eye.*

How often did this man go unnoticed? How long had it been since anybody really cared? Did that *ever* happen? Had anybody really stopped to pay attention, to pray for him, to do anything but to put a coin in his basket and walk away? We don't know for certain. Maybe his family and friends cared; someone cared enough to get him there each day. But Luke points out that looking this man in the eye meant something to both Peter and John. They make a connection. This man matters to them. They're following Jesus' command to love one another as He loved them; to love their neighbor as themselves. That's why they stop and he is healed.

How many people do we know who might experience real and personal healing if one of us were to look them in the eye and love them, really and truly? No extraordinary show of power, no great sign or wonder that we could see, but who would be supernaturally healed because we stopped long enough to show we genuinely cared about them.

I once heard a pastor talk about how another pastor friend knew he was experiencing a hard time. And that pastor friend hugged him. And it wasn't the pat on the back, how ya doin, let's stay masculine hug. It was a full on bear hug. And he didn't let go. At first, he was embarrassed. It was awkward. Then he let himself hug back. And then he cried, and then he ugly cried, that kind where you just let it all go. And his friend didn't let go. Finally that was over, and then the hug was over, and he felt loved, like God had given him a hug. Because his friend was willing to overcome that awkwardness to provide what he needed at the moment.

And looking problems dead in the eye has rich potential. David was the only one who would look Goliath in the eye and say, "God is bigger than you." Moses was afraid, but he went with Aaron to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." The prophets looked at sin in the eye and told the people, "Get right with God."

As Christians, we can also look problems dead in the eye and call them out for what they are and deal with them. We sometimes get embarrassed because some problems aren't polite to talk about, because they're so painful that just to talk about them brings up hurt and we shy away from it. Or the problems appear too big, and we think, "What can *I* do?" But things start changing when we get past ourselves and say, "What can *I do*?"

I'll give you the problem we confronted at my conference the last few days. The number one cause of death in America is not gun violence, even with the terrible tragedy a couple days ago; it's not suicide; it's not heart disease or cancer. It's abortion. No one likes to talk about it because it's a painful subject. In every crowd, someone has done it or thought about doing it; someone has encouraged it or facilitated it. There's a lot of guilt and shame and so we don't look at it straight on; we just call it a choice and move on.

But here's the thing: Jesus gave Himself so that we could deal with our hurts, deal with our sins, deal with the terrible things in our past so that we won't be defined by them anymore, and move forward in faith into a new life with Him. When we know that Jesus forgives us for anything we've done – anything – we can stare those painful things in the face and speak truth into it and speak God's life into it.

I heard on Thursday about the 40 Days For Life prayer vigil. It's a 40 day prayer ministry outside of abortion clinics around the country. No interfering, no mean messages, nothing that would betray Jesus' love for the people involved. Just prayer, 24/7, for 40 days outside these centers. Since 2004, 96 abortion clinics that 40 Days For Life vigils prayed for have closed their doors. Not because of anything but praying to God for the lives of children and moms and dads. Simply because someone was willing to look at the problem, acknowledge it for what it is, and organize the church to do the one thing we can do, which is take it to the Lord in prayer. We are the church best when we face this world head on, knowing that the power of God is behind us.

Last part of this passage we're going to tackle today: Peter says to the man, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And the man doesn't just walk, he dances! He jumps! He praises God! Because now he is physically restored and can worship God in His courts. And now, he knows the power of God, and he knows the power of God's Son, in whose name he was healed.

So our final thing to think about this morning: *are you willing to bless others with what you've got?* Because the thing that the beggar wants, they don't have. I don't know if the beggar was upset at first when he heard the news. Here he thought these guys might have something big for him, and they have no money. But everything turned around when Peter was willing to give the man the gift of his healing. That gift, the gift God really wanted him to have, changes his life.

I want to encourage you today, don't sell yourself short. God loves you. He had claimed you through the power of Jesus. If you have faith in Jesus and want to live like Him, you are empowered with the Spirit of God who lives in you. And God does not leave His people empty-handed for ministry. You have gifts, talents, treasures that God has given you. He has equipped you. You have all that you need to bless others and so much more!

We don't often live in that place of encouragement, though. I forget too. It's so easy to live in the world of "silver and gold I do not have." We don't have what we think is the solution to the problem. We don't have money. Or we don't have time. We don't have talent. We don't have skill. We back away from helping others as God would have us do because we downplay the gifts God has given to us. We only see the gifts we don't have. If only I could have the money of Bill Gates, then I could really make a dent. If only I had the patience to work with the hard-luck cases. If only I had the talent to sing, or to play an instrument, or speak in front of people, or whatever it is you might do but you don't feel you've got what it takes. You're in the stinkin thinkin of what you don't have rather than what you do have.

You can state what you don't have like Peter does. I don't have a ton of money. I am not going to supply every village in the world with clean water; I'm not going to put a shirt on every back. But what I have, I'll give to you. God has given me something; I can give it. I may not be able to help every village, but I can help one. You might not be able to sing, but you can read Scripture or fill communion cups or pick up after church. You might not have patience to work with hard-luck cases or little kids, but there's somebody in your life you can connect with who really needs to see a little bit of God in their life that you can shine for them. Your miracle does not have to be dramatic; it's a miracle any time God accomplishes His will through us.

So the first thing is getting past what you don't have. The second is willingness to use what you do. And sometimes that's harder. Because sometimes doing God's will gets us in trouble – this healing eventually ends with Peter and John being thrown in jail and led before the Jewish religious council – the Sanhedrin. Sometimes giving what we have leads to more giving, more commitment, more of God stuff in our lives crowding out the me stuff. And we all know it deep down. The more we give, the more God may ask of us. And that's a good thing. The more our lives are in God's hands, the more secure we are on His foundation, the more blessings we see. But it also means less time and money and energy to spend on ourselves. We know Jesus said we needed to die to ourselves, but real world – that's tough!

But let me encourage you today...this is our path. This is our destiny. This is what we are called to do, what we are meant to do. Not to be famous; not to save the world, because Jesus has that covered. Not to be anxious about what we cannot give, but to freely and willingly give what we have so that the name of God is glorified and honored through us. We can do it. And we can pray that God would give us the peace and strength to do it more and more often.

A miracle occurred, and it happened because of God's grace and love and power. It's all God. Yet it also happened because two men led by the Spirit of God, working together, looked a man and his problem dead in the eye and gave that man what they had to deal with it. That miracle led thousands more into the church of Jesus Christ. God will do the miracle – will you be available for God to do a miracle through you as Peter and John were?