

Roy's sermon for 11/10/2020

Acts 3:1-10 'A Cripple Set Free Pt.1 Jesus Takes Us By The Hand!'

Last time we finished our look at the account by Luke in the book of Acts concerning the day of Pentecost. 'The Birth, And The Growth Principles of Christ's Church' I called the sermon. As I explained, there is not some special equation that when all the particular parts are added together we get growth and blessing in our congregations. (Though many seem to imply such things today) Growth in the Church of Jesus Christ comes about by abiding in those principles which were set down in Acts 2:42 by Peter in his sermon at the day of Pentecost. "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Our explanation of "devoted" came to us from the old Collins dictionary: To dedicate. To consecrate. To the vow. To give oneself wholly to. These early Christians gave themselves wholly to the apostles' teaching, as did the Bereans in Acts 17:11. They gave themselves wholly to the fellowship. They met together, they encouraged one another, they ate together and they shared their financial support with each other when circumstances called for it. They dedicated, they gave themselves wholly to the ordinances of the Lord supper, and they devoted, they gave themselves wholly, to prayer!

Yes Beloved, here I explained, are our biblically established church growth principles. Those things to which both Jesus, and His Apostles, are calling us to abide in. If we always abide in these things, we will never go wrong, because they have been breathed out by God the Holy Spirit. They are not men's equations for growth statistics, but God's very Breath on the matter! And yet the reality is, even if we do our utmost to abide in all of these things in faith, "His Spirit blows where God wills," numerical, (and indeed spiritual), growth comes from Him. We are simply called to remain faithful!

So now we move on to the next page of our walk through Peter's life with Jesus: an ordinary man serving an extraordinary God. Acts 3:1-10 'A Cripple Set Free, Part one: Jesus Takes Us By The Hand!' But before I begin, let me give thanks to Archbishop Marcus Loane, the first Australian born head of the Anglican church, for his commentary on the book of Acts; it has been tremendously helpful to me.

So, Acts 3:1 "One day when Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer." So the first thing which we learn about Peter and John since the Lord has been taken up into heaven, and after that momentous day of Pentecost on which the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all kinds of people, is that their lives as Jewish men continues. They went up to worship "at the time of prayer", three in the afternoon we are told. But why is this significant you ask? Well, it is significant because it shows us that just because they were now Christian, does not mean that they separated themselves from everything which their former lives were.

Many times over the years we've heard Jesus' Words "be in the world but not of the world." By all means those things which are contradictory to Christ's teachings we must "cut off" as He explains in Matthew's gospel, but severing ties with all of our past, is not imperative. These were Jewish men, and as long as their former lives were not in opposition to what Jesus taught, there was no reason for them to separate themselves from that part of their community. And conversely, there was great benefit and blessing poured out through them as they did so, as we will see. They go on to boldly testify to who Jesus was and what He had done in their lives. This tells us that just because we have been recently converted, (or indeed have even come decades ago to know the Lord), it does not mean that we are called by Him, to go and live in a manner which sees us separate ourselves from

our past and the rest of the world, and even from society itself! Throughout the millennia, hundreds of thousands (perhaps even millions) of people have sought to do this very thing. But the question must be asked: for whose benefit have they sought to do this? Yes, living a life which is solely devoted to Jesus has great merit. But how then do we in our own way, fulfil His Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 “which calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations”, if we separate ourselves from them? We can't. And nowhere throughout the Bible do we read the scriptures telling us to get ourselves to a monastery or a nunnery.

No, we cannot testify to the perishing world around us if we are not in it. If you are a golfer, keep having a round of golf with your friends. If you are a member of the local Bowling Club, keep playing bowls. Enjoy the company of your friends. Have a meal and even a wine or a beer after the game. As long as it doesn't lead to excess and it's not on the Lord's Day of course. Because if it is, and you do, you are telling your friends that your sport or your club means more to you than your Saviour and your faith. And you will be tearing down that testimony about Jesus, which you are seeking to build up before them!

So, “one day”, (not long after Pentecost the commentators tell us) “Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at 3:00 in the afternoon. Verse 2: “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.” Brothers and sisters, what we need to try to do here is to take ourselves out of our 21st century context, with its modern disability aids, with all of its wheelchairs and electric scooters. Its walkers and all of the advancements in physiotherapy and rehabilitation exercises. Special beds and chairs which lift people in and out and up, and also, even the hope and possibility that one day the paralysed may actually walk again! Such things are modern day medical miracles brethren, be not mistaken. But again, we need to take ourselves back 2000 years. There were very few paved roads. Most were dirt and dust and when it rained, they turned to mud! There was no social welfare, no disability pension and oftentimes, such children would have been put to death at birth. Their parents were even believed by society to have been cursed by God. And that is where we enter into this unnamed man's life! He is at least 40 years old, and has been crippled from birth. Let's say, that he has been begging since he was ten years old, which is not unreasonable, because most children were expected to work in those days, particularly if they were poor.

So begging since he was 10. That is 10,950 days. Look at the words “where he was put every day to beg.” Now there were beggars by profession and there were beggars by necessity. The latter were the most miserable because they had no choice in the matter. Yes 10,950 days come rain hail or shine, and it may well have been even more! Every day he was carried to be placed there to sit all day in the misery that was his life. While the world and life passed him by. Most likely turning the other way as they did so. We need also to understand that the idea of being healed from such a state was beyond fanciful. It was as it were, to touch the moon. The countenance of such a person was to keep their head down with their eyes looking anywhere but up. Certainly never to catch the eye of those he was seeking help from. And what we need also to see here Beloved is not only the wretched state of this nameless man, but also the helpless and pitiful state of us all and of our unsaved souls, apart from Jesus. Thinking only of the present physical need. With no thoughts of being healed of that open eternally festering wound, which is called sin!

Dear friends, sin has crippled us all from birth. It has disabled us from attaining eternal life. We just don't know it. Verse 3 “when he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.” And friends notice how verses 4 and 5 give us insight into his miserable state: “Peter looked straight at him”. Now this would have been unthinkable. These people would have been like the people in India referred to as the untouchables. When such poor souls perish in the streets people step over

them. Yes, "Peter looks straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us". Well this was not part of the system. That was not how the begging system worked. You didn't engage with the beggar; if you felt like it you threw them a coin as you walked past and you most likely looked the other way; because if you didn't you were confronted with the sad reality of how many people lived. But not "Peter and John"! No the downcast wandering gaze of the beggar is called to "look at us." So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them." Perhaps he was thinking, this has never happened before, this is going to be a good payday for me. Yes, these two verses carry us into the life of this man. Totally at the mercy or lack thereof, from complete strangers. Like Lazarus and the rich man's table. Just hoping some scraps of life might fall before him! Verse 6 "Then Peter said silver and gold have I none. But what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

But again, I want you to notice the imagery here and the powerful picture which it paints of ourselves and all of mankind, apart from Jesus. Every day, this man had sat since he was a boy at the very entryway to the earthly temple of God. Watching people coming and going to and from worship and prayer for over 30 years (10,950 days), as the people of God and life passed him by. With the door of the temple open as it were, but him never having the legs or the strength (or perhaps even the desire), to follow them in. Yes apart from Jesus, this is who we all are. Though some have bid us come, and perhaps many others have passed us by throughout our lives. Yet we are stuck fast in our eternal paralysis. We lie there, helpless, at the gate to Glory. All of us, of ourselves, doomed to never enter in. Bound in our slavery to sin, never daring or caring to raise our glance to heaven! This is the natural state of man, until Jesus takes him by the hand!

It is also often times that the religiosity of the day, offers the lost little hope other than the slavery of another kind. The slavery of rituals and mysticism to gods that can neither hear, see, speak, know or care. Yes, 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." Now just think of this word brothers and sisters. Surely it is the word which he has longed to have someone say to him for 40 years. "Walk". What must have been going through his mind? Is he serious? "Walk"? Can he not see why I am here in this place? Is he really telling me to do that which by God, my legs have been able to do for me for my whole life? "Walk". Where it says in Verse 7 "Peter takes him by the hand" I have no doubt that the man reaches out for Peter to do this!

Beloved, think of the courage it must have taken to do this. We might feel well, he had nothing to lose. But to have the hope of being freed of 40 years of misery raised as never before, and then to have that hope dashed is not nothing. Yes I believe it took great courage. But it took more than this: it took the seed of faith in Jesus! Matthew 17:20b "Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain move from here to there and it will move."

Can you see, that's what was happening in this man's life? Yes Jesus has already sent His Spirit to work in this man's life. There was now the tiny seed of faith in his soul which by God's grace had begun to grow. So as he reaches out, (not only does Peter), but Jesus takes him by the hand! And friends when Jesus takes us by the hand, there is no power in heaven or on earth or under the earth that can hold us captive! But one of the great ironies and tragedies of this life, is that before Jesus opens our hearts and minds, we don't even know that we are trapped in the bounds and slavery of sin. Yes we live in this blissful ignorance in which Satan holds us captive. Listen to the depth of our slavery and blindness as it is expressed in John chapter 8:31-36: "to the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never

been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

Jesus speaks of them being "set free" and yet they are oblivious to their slavery. They don't even acknowledge their own history. They say they've never been anyone's slaves. And yet if they knew their own history they would know how often, (because of their rebellion and rejection of God) they had indeed been the slaves of many other nations. Yes, Verse 34 "I tell you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." So a slave's position is fleeting, with no choice in the matter. The slave is in the hands of the master. And the master here, brothers and sisters, is sin! Yes Beloved, such is the depth to which sin's talons have sunken into our souls, that we don't even know we are in bondage, until the Son of God sets us free."

Brothers and sisters, we know this to be true. Try and talk to your unsaved family and friends about the state of their soul, and they will think you are from another planet. A slave to sin? Accountable to God? What are you talking about? Just like the Jews here before Jesus in John chapter 8 "we are nobody's slaves", but Jesus explains to these arrogant obstinate people in Verse 36 "so if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

O dear friends, perhaps you are really struggling with these things. Perhaps you don't believe that there is anything for you to be set free from. Well may I suggest, that if this is the case, then you have never met Jesus at His Cross. "So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed." If Jesus is telling us that we need to be "set free" from something, then you can trust that something is holding us captive, apart from Him and His Blood! Acts 3:7-8: "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." Can you see that unlike the self-righteous Jewish elite, this man understood the idea of being kept in bondage. For 40 years his legs had never worked. He'd never been able to move about freely on his own. He'd never been able to stand and look a person in the eye as it were. Never been able to ply a trade, most likely never been married. And never been able to walk into the temple of God! So he knew what it meant to be held captive.

Yes Beloved this is who we are. This is who we are, until Jesus takes us by the hand. And I want you to notice where the place is that he goes first with his new legs: into "the temple courts" of the temple of God! Just imagine, after decades of watching people coming and going to and from worship for the very first time, not only his body but his spirit too made whole. What would you do? Well exactly what he did: go "jumping and praising God."

My question dear friends as I close this morning: Is this how we feel about what Jesus has done for us? Now of course we have our struggles, but do we praise Him with all our souls? Do we in our hearts leap for joy when we come to worship Him? Or has Christ's Hand to us through His Blood just become religion? Malachi 4:2 "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." Verses 9 to 10 of Acts chapter 3: "when all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognised 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."

Oh Beloved, let us not stop being "filled with awe and wonder" at what God has done, and continues to do for us each day of our lives, since Jesus first took us by the hand!

Let's pray.