



Central Peninsula Church

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The Power of Name Dropping

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

In an age of “No Touch” rules in schools, sexual harassment lawsuits, and zero tolerance policies in the work place, the pendulum appears to have swung. Cuddle Parties are growing in popularity throughout the United States. During the typical Cuddle Party, folks will spend \$30 for the promise of several hours of snuggling and hugging with as many as 20 complete strangers. Cynics will be surprised that any hint of sex is strictly forbidden. The 16 rules, found at cuddleparty.com, are intended to create a safe environment for huggers to get the “touch and affection” missing from everyday life without worrying about unwanted advances. Huggers of all ages are encouraged to bring stuffed animals, munchies, and the anticipation of becoming more secure than ever.

We’ve been studying the book of Acts together. The 2nd chapter of Acts is almost like a cuddle party. The church is gathered for teaching and fellowship. They’re sharing their goods and money with each other as needs arise. They pray together on a regular basis. It all just sounds so warm and nice. Why not just end the story here and let them live happily ever after? It’s like the words of the old hymn, “Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that draws me from a world of care.”

Perhaps because many churches have tried to do exactly that, Luke immediately follows this cozy description of the church with an account of the church’s confrontation with the world around it. He wants us to know that no matter how wonderful our gathering together is, it’s not a detour around the misery of the world. It started as an ordinary day...

We don’t know how much time transpired between the Day of Pentecost and this day. But on this day Peter and John decided to observe the temple prayer service. **“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer”** (v.1). The temple maintained three prayer services each day. The first was early in the morning; the second was at the ninth hour or what we would call 3:00 pm; and the third was at sunset. So at 3:00 pm, in the heat of the day, Peter and

John head out along the dusty paths of Jerusalem. I would imagine it just seemed like a regular day to them. Nothing special. Nothing unusual.

Even this man who was being carried along and set down by the main gate of the temple wasn’t all of that out of the ordinary. **“And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms”** (vv.2-3). He was set down every day at the very same place by friends or loved ones. It was a good place to beg. Luke calls it the Beautiful Gate, which according to Josephus was a huge double gate about 75 feet high and 65 feet wide. It was made of Corinthian bronze and decorated with silver and gold. This was the main eastern entrance to the temple precincts from the Court of the Gentiles into the Women’s Court. Many pious Jews would pass in and out of this place as they came and went from worship. Peter and John and even Jesus must have passed this same man many times before in this same place. His face was part of the woodwork. His voice so familiar you didn’t even notice it. But chances are he did pretty well for himself there. I mean, what better place to beg than in front of a church? The Jews considered it an act worthy of divine reward to give alms to such a man. And Luke wants us to know that he was a good case for charity. Dr. Luke uses medical terminology to describe a congenital problem that centered on his feet and rendered him unable to walk on his own. We know from chapter 4 that he was about 40 years old and he had never walked a day in his life.

So there he was, sitting by this Beautiful Gate, a picture of contrast: the splendid and the squalid! We don’t know why on this particular day Peter and John decided to stop. Unlike so many of us it seems they were willing to be interrupted. They saw that God might have something for them that wasn’t on their list. **“But Peter,**

along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'Look at us!' And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them" (vv.4–5). As he began asking them for alms, Peter "fixed his gaze" on him and commanded him: "Look at us!" You know and I know that's the last thing you should say to a beggar. If you can just avoid eye contact you can also avoid responsibility. Whatever you do, don't look at him when he's looking at you! But Peter didn't want this to be a mechanical act of charity, he wanted this to be a personal encounter. No doubt, at that moment, looking into Peter's eyes, this man expected to add some weight to his cup. He had learned not to expect too much. "Just a little help. Just a few coins. I'm not asking for the world here."

But that's when Peter said something. Perhaps with a gesture towards the silver and gold of the gate, he said, **"But Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!'"** (v.6). I could just see the man's eyes drop in disappointment. But what did Peter have? It's hard to imagine he didn't have a few coins in his pocket. Why not just give him what he wanted and get on with your day? But Peter seemed to know that he had something better he could give that man. He had a *name*. And so he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" Today we say, "What's in a name?" But in Peter's day, to invoke the name was really to invoke the person. Peter wants this man to know that there is a living person behind what is about to happen. It's not by his own authority or power that he gives this command to walk, it's by the authority of the person of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene.

The man might have thought Peter was mocking him. "Walk? Yeah, right!" So Peter doesn't leave it at that. **"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God"** (vv.7–8). Just as he had seen Jesus do, he reaches out and helps him up. Someone has said, "The power was Christ's, but the hand was Peter's." As Peter seizes him by the right hand, his legs are immediately strengthened. He doesn't stand up, he leaps us. A month ago I took my son to the doctor to

have his full arm cast removed that had been on for eight weeks. We were both so excited to get it off and to see him use that arm. It was like unwrapping a long awaited for gift. But when they took it off and we looked at his arm, it was not a pretty site. Besides being atrophied, he couldn't even bend it. It was only over time that he could do much with it. Imagine this man's legs, gnarled and twisted after 40 years of not being used, yet Luke says "immediately" he's leaping and walking.

And, yes, praising God. **"With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God;"** (vv.8–9). He follows Peter and John into the temple, not being at all reverential. And people notice. "Could it be," they must have thought, "This is the same guy we passed by each day? Isn't he the one who sat by the Beautiful Gate, spoiling our view? What's happened to him?" Perhaps one of them even recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah, **"Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy"** (Isaiah 35:6).

I. The church does not offer silver and gold but salvation in the name of Jesus Christ.

But no one was more surprised than the man who had been healed. Remember, he started that day expecting nothing more than a handout. This was a reasonable expectation. And when Peter and John stopped and spoke he thought that they would drop a few coins in his cup and be gone. There was really nothing more that he could possibly expect. He wasn't asking for the world!

But Peter couldn't give him what he expected. He couldn't give him what he wanted. But he could give him what he needed even more. He could give him the ability to walk. He didn't have money but he did have the power to heal in Jesus' name. Instead of alms, he gave him a cure.

But I think Peter even gave him more than that. It was a wonderful thing for this man to be able to walk. But if that's all he got out of this experience, he missed out on something even better.

Don't get me wrong. God cares about human suffering. Here is this remarkable miracle that alleviates suffering at least at a certain level. And because it occurs here in the book of Acts, there are many who say, "People ought to be healed like this in the church every day." There are those who say it's actually wrong for a Christian to be sick. They tell us that Jesus died not only for our sins, but for our sicknesses. They claim that Christians who rely upon

doctors show a lack of faith. This kind of theology is the basis for the activity of many “faith healers” who hold large meetings, telling people that God expects them to be well, that it is only their lack of faith which keeps them from being healed.

But that’s to ignore the deeper purpose of these miracles recorded in Scripture. Miracles like this one were intended to authenticate the message of the gospel. They were signs to the people at the beginning, when the foundation of the church was being laid, that these apostles were genuine messengers of God. In 2 Cor. 12 Paul refers to himself as having done the **“signs of a true apostle”** which, he says, are **“signs and wonders and mighty works”** (2 Cor. 12:12). These deeds were given to the apostles to prove the truth of the gospel they preached. This is confirmed by Hebrews 2:3–4 where the writer says that Jesus first preached the gospel, **“and it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles.”**

Now of course we know that God still can heal when he chooses to. He’s a gracious Father and there are verses which tell us that we should ask him to heal us physically, and that sometimes he’ll do so. James 5:14–15 is a good example, **“Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”**, where we’re told, if anyone is sick, to gather the elders together and let them pray. James says God will hear the prayer of faith and raise the sick. We do that here. But God does not promise always to heal. There are many instances even in Scripture when he doesn’t heal even the strong in faith. Paul’s close friend Timothy seemed to have a stomach ailment. Paul wrote to him and told him to take a little wine to help it. Here is a clear instance when Paul could not heal a sick friend and a kind of medicine was prescribed. We know that Paul also had a thorn in the flesh which he said the Lord refused to heal.

So we have to put this miracle in Acts 3 in perspective. It was a sign. It was designed for this lame man and those around him to receive something even better, which Peter went on to preach about. That’s why he says down in v.19, **“Therefore, Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come.”** That’s what this man needed even more than the ability to walk. Someone has said that every

miracle is a parable, designed not only to demonstrate the power of God, but also to illustrate people’s deeper needs. You see, what happens to your body is not nearly as important as what happens inside you. You can be crippled and lame not only physically, but spiritually. That’s what sin does to us.

Here in Acts is a parable of the condition in which we live apart from Christ. This lame man is a picture of us, apart from Christ. Like this man, each of us is born spiritually crippled. We’re born in sin, unable to walk as the kind of man or woman God wants us to be. Sin paralyzes us. Deep down we know we’re helpless and we think we know what we want and we ask for it. But what is really needed is what Peter and John gave—not silver and gold, but the name of Jesus, forgiveness of sin and the power of a new life. We’re looking for alms, but God has a cure. What we really needed is the gospel. That’s the only thing that can wipe away our sin and make us whole. This is what God offers to people today. Through the powerful name of Jesus he offers to cleanse us from sin and make us whole.

II. As disciples of Jesus, we may not offer folks what they want but we can offer them what they need.

And that’s the most important thing we have to offer people. We may not be able to offer people what they want but we can offer them with what they need. This is a time of year when people tend to come to church who might not normally do so. What is it that people want when they come to church? What do people want when they come to God?

A man called and said he wanted to meet with me. We met for coffee and he explained that he had cheated on his wife and they were separated and it looked like the marriage might not survive. He went on to tell me that he had started going to church and he had found a church that didn’t make him feel guilty but made him feel good. He said he talked to the minister and he told him that God wanted him to be happy and if his marriage didn’t make him happy then he should probably get out of it. Some people want to go to church and find a God who will just make them feel better and let them do whatever they want.

Others come to church to find a God who will somehow fix their problems. Maybe it’s their marriage, or like this man they have some kind of physical

problem, or perhaps they're just lonely. Musician Billy Joel has won many awards, including Male Artist of the Year. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. But on a personal level, his life has been less than accomplished. "The happiest times in my life were when my relationships were going well," he said. "But in my whole life, I haven't met the person I can sustain a relationship with yet. So I'm discontented about that. I'm angry with myself. I have regrets." He went on to say, "You don't get hugged by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame... I want what everybody else wants: to love and to be loved..."

There are so many different reasons that people come to church. There are so many things that people want. But I wonder if all of those things are merely symptoms of a much deeper need; a much more serious disease. What if all of those exterior wants could be traced back to their source? I think we would find that they led to a kind of spiritual vacuum that could only be filled with the love of God. I think we would find at the root of it is a disease called sin that can only be cleansed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene.

Even someone like Mother Teresa, who met so many physical needs, understood this. She was often challenged about the long-term effects of her ministry. Someone asked her, "Why give people fish to eat instead of teaching them how to fish?" She had a quick response: "But my people can't even stand. They're sick, crippled, demented. When I have given them fish to eat and they can stand, I'll turn them over and you give them the rod to catch the fish." But she also said that she gave people more than "fish." More important was that which came from the heart—love and joy. She said, "If our actions are just useful actions that give no joy to the people, our poor people would never be able to rise up to the call which we want them to hear, the call to come closer to God. We want to make them feel that they're loved."

CONCLUSION

We've seen that the book of Acts is about the early church. And it's something that today's church must always turn back to in order to remember who we are and what we're called to do. In chapter 2 we

saw this beautiful portrait of the church as it met together and was devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. But here in chapter 3 we see all of this fleshed out and put into action. And we learn what our calling really is.

We learn that we must not stay in our holy huddle. We have to break out of it. That's the business of the church. I've called our study of the book of Acts, *The Rest of the Story*. We learned at the start that Acts is all about what Jesus continued to do and teach. And today the rest of that story continues. That's why the church is still here, because through us the Lord continues to do and to teach. And what is the Lord still doing? Well, Jesus said, "**I came to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Lk.19:10). So he's still seeking and saving the lost. That's what he was doing through Peter and John and that's what he's still doing through us. So don't be afraid to be in the world and to confront all the evil, all the human misery, with the powerful name of Jesus.

To do that you will need to be ready for God's interruptions. This is what makes life with Jesus so exciting—you never know who the Lord will put in your path. You never know what he has planned. Peter and John thought they were just going to a prayer service, but God had other plans, and they got caught up in something far more wonderful than a prayer service. They got to see the Lord change a life. They got to see the powerful name of Jesus bring transformation. How many of you are interruptible? How many of you are willing to let the Lord redirect you? How many of you miss out taking part in what God is doing because you insist on getting to the prayer meeting on time when God says I want you somewhere else?

Third, we have to remember to offer folks what they need and not just what they want. All the world can do is give alms. That's what all the political, educational, and social help amounts to—alms. All of our interest in entertainment, whether it's movies or music or sports, what can it really do for us? It can give a little relief—alms! We shouldn't ignore people's physical wants, but neither should we substitute meeting people's wants for meeting people's real need. The most important thing people need is not alms, but it's the power and love of God in Jesus Christ, the Nazarene. In Jesus Christ we don't just get temporary relief, we get a cure.

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