
Peter Preaches in the Temple

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 28 June

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 - Acts 3:11-26

Part 4 in Acts series



Let's pray, Lord as we work through this passage help us both to understand it and apply it to our lives, amen.

Last week we looked at the healing of the lame man and the succinct but very effective message of Peter, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk.

In our passage today Peter has a lot more to say. Before we look briefly at what Peter says following the sign, a few comments about signs in general.

If I'm driving somewhere I'm always thankful for signs along the way. But as thankful as I am, it would be somewhat counterproductive if I hopped out of my car, looked over the sign, figured out how it was made, and spent so much time focusing on the sign, I didn't move past it.

God has worked a sign through the name and authority of Jesus. Understandably the people are filled with wonder and amazement. That's how we finished last week v10.

V11 while he, that, is the healed lame man, clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's portico utterly astonished.

There is opportunity and there is danger here. The opportunity is to point to God and proclaim the gospel. As indeed happened at Pentecost with the result that many thousands were saved.

The danger, focus on the sign, or on Peter and John as ministers of the sign. Or to say it another way. When the sign is the focus, or people are the focus, rather than God, and God's glory, we are in dangerous territory.

V12 "when Peter saw it," that is the astonishment, and wonder of the people, "he addressed the people." "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk."

Another aspect of the danger is what I might call formula thinking. To be successful in say, healing ministry, we have to find the right words, have the right amount of faith, and hey presto, $X + Y = \text{success}$.

I said hey presto deliberately because it's magical thinking. It's also manipulative. Get the formula right and God will be compelled to work."

The prophets in the OT warned against such thinking and behaviour. It was the religious practices of the nations who worshiped false gods who used incantations and various other things, like child sacrifices, in the hope that the gods would do what they wanted.

Not so with the One true God of Israel. God is not one to be manipulated. Faith is not a formula. Let me say further, that God's people are not to be manipulated either.

There are regrettably church leaders around today who act as if we are still in the OT times. They set themselves up as prophets and apostles. Very often with the result they both manipulate the vulnerable in their own congregation, and embarrass the wider church.

We can't make a formula out of the healing of the lame man. There is a remarkable lack of detail. Maybe deliberately, lest we enter dangerous territory.

- There is for instance, no mention God speaking to Peter or John, though he must have.

- There is no mention of the lame man's faith. Though something must have been happening as Peter was looking intently at him, "stretching his eyes to the limit" in seeing this man.
- There is no prayer of healing.
- There is no unpacking of the miracle in the sense of giving a whole bunch of details that we could replicate.

There is simply a statement made and a command given. "I don't have silver or gold, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk." Then a hand is offered as Peter helps the man to his feet.

This is not to say prayer and faith is not important and needed in the mission we have as God's people, as heralds of the Gospel. It is to say, that God and God's work must always be the focus. Suffice to say, the best thing we can do if we want ministry success is always make sure that God, and God's glory is paramount.

I hope that proves an encouragement in a challenging area. I hope it takes some of the pressure off. I say that because I think it true that sometimes we fail to act because we don't know exactly what we should be doing or saying. We don't know the formula.

I know that is true of my own life when I feel out of my depth. Or when I lack the kind of clarity or direction I feel I need.

Maybe the only formula I need is this. Trust God. Open my ears. And know the word of God well enough to decipher the message.

To Peter message then.

We have already looked at how Peters Pentecost sermon, and his stating of the facts, had people cut to the heart and turning to Christ. From Peters sermons in both ch 2 & 3 let me say this. The gospel is not so much "don't worry be happy," as much as "understand this."

In the context, Peter was talking to people who knew the story as the people of God but they hadn't really understood it.

What they need is this.

- They need to know about God.
- And they need to know about themselves.
- They need to know the problem.
- They need to know the solution.

The sermon very briefly. It follows something of a God, us, God, us, God, us, pattern.

Firstly, God, what God did. V 13a. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus.

Now Us. what we did. Vs 14-15a we rejected the holy and righteous one. We asked to have a murderer given to us. We killed the author of life. What a terrible paradox. We killed the author of life.

God. Not a problem. God raised him from the dead. Vs 15b.

Vs 16 and by faith in his name his name itself has made this man strong whom you see and know and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

Faith in or faith of. If we run into problems when we think God is limited in some way of our faith is small or faltering. Our faith is never the point, the object of our faith is what's important.

Or to say it another way. Our faith should not be in our faith, it should be in Jesus. Again Peter and John are making sure they, and even the healing are not the focus, Jesus is. The real Jesus. The Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to tie this passage to the last one we looked at.

Now comes a pastoral moment in a pretty challenging message Vs 17 “and now friends I know that you acted in ignorance as did also your rulers.” Verse 18, In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

In other words don't panic. God's got this. You think the situation is beyond redemption? This is the way that God is actually making redemption possible. Redemption comes the death and resurrection of His Son our saviour.

Us again. What we need to do - vs 19a, repent and turn to God.

What God will do -

- vs19b wipe out our sins.
- V20 refresh us with the presence of Jesus.
- V21 looking both forwards and back, this Jesus who must remain in heaven until the time of “universal restoration” that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.

The very end of the story, universal restoration, in and through the work of Christ, is being signalled here as it was signalled by the prophets of old. Lastly, another “us” bit. What do we need to do in response to all that God has done? Listen to Jesus.

Vs 22 “Moses said the Lord your God will raise up for you, from your own people a prophet me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.”

As Peter proclaims the gospel and points to Jesus, he wants us to understand,

- vs 13 Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah 52 that looks ahead to God’s, servant, suffering and yet glorified.
- Vs 14 Jesus is the holy and righteous one.
- Vs 15 Jesus is the author of life.
- Vs 22 Jesus is the prophet foretold by Moses. And we need to listen to him

The terrible irony that Peter makes clear. “we killed the author of life.” The wonderful solution Peter proclaims, “but God raised him from death.” I know I am an Anglican but can I jump up and down and say hallelujah?

And again, lest we fail to understand the kindness and generosity of God. Vs 17 and now friends I know that you acted in ignorance as did also your rulers. God knows us. God knows we are but dust. But we are dust that he was willing to die for.

One thing is clear when it comes to the Gospel. Watering it down. Making it palatable. Sidestepping the challenges. How’s that working as an evangelistic strategy? 3000 converted on the day of Pentecost. Another 2000 following this sign which facilitates the Gospel again being proclaimed by Peter.

And day by day the Lord adds to their number those who were being saved. Best we follow the model we find in the scriptures. Best we help people understand who Jesus is, who we are, and what that means.

As far as the signs? It’s the menu not the meal. Only Jesus, the living bread, and the flowing water of life, is able to nourish and sustain us, till that glorious day hinted at in vs 22, the day of “universal restoration” when all things in heaven and earth will be united in, and be at one with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And talking of nourishing and sustaining. How most usually does this happen? Through the word of God.

At Pentecost and especially in the healing of the lame man precious little detail about the supernatural event. Only the effect and that it had the crowd awestruck, wondering, astonished. Now they are looking intently. Now “their eyes were stretched to the limit.” And let me say also that their hearts are open to receive the message, and a good number of them do.

Thousands of people are gathered in Solomons Portico. It's a part of the temple that could hold between 6 - 9000 people if packed. 2- 3000 comfortably. However many were gathered in the portico that day, they were awestruck, wondering, astonished.

They did not get a 5 min Anglican homily. The miracle happened at the hour of prayer, 3pm. Peter, John and the leaping praising healed man enter the temple where it looks like Peter preaches till the temple police come and all three were carted off to prison for the night.

For 3 hours till the Temple closed at 6pm Peter is helping people join the dots while he holds the attention of thousands of people. As he leads people to understanding. That generally takes time, and is generally not done in the way we tend to do it these days in the majority of mainline churches.

Maybe that's a big part why they are shrinking. Along with watering down and compromising the Gospel message in the hope the people will suddenly flood in.... That is not to say every sermon has to be long. I've heard 30-45 min that had about 5 mins of content.

We could note also the that the words behind event that sparked Peters proclamation took about 10 seconds to say. “I don't have silver or gold, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk”. 25 words. But a very productive 25 words.

Then comes, it looks like, a 3 hr sermon, which wraps up vs 26 by reminding the people of God that when God raised up his servant, he sent him first of all to them to bless them by turning them from their wicked ways.

To the Jew first then the Gentile. God's Covenant with Abraham was that though his descendants all the nations would be blessed, vs 25.

Turning from sin and to Jesus is the ultimate blessing and the Gospel in a nutshell. In the next chapter another two thousand make that move.

The enemy, Satan makes a move too.

Who will win the day. Teaser. As John Stott notes in his commentary on Acts. I paraphrase. You can do your best to muzzle the messenger, but you can't muzzle the gospel.

Let's pray, Living Lord Jesus, set our hearts aflame that we might live to the glory of your name and be a source of blessing to those around us, amen.