

May 14 Lesson 11 (NIV)

Jumping for Joy

Devotional Reading: Luke 10:1–9

Background Scripture: Acts 3

Acts 3:1–11

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame 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. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.

Key Text

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

—Acts 3:8

Jesus Calls Us

Unit 3: The Birth of the Church

Lessons 9–13

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How to Say It

Gentiles/*jen*-tiles.

Messiah/*Meh-sigh*-uh.

Nazareth/*Naz-uh-reth*.

Pentecost/*Pent-ih-kost*.

Introduction

A. Uncompassionate Attitude

A few years ago, I helped lead a team of students on a missions week to a remote country. One of our team members was in a wheelchair, and the destination country's main airport was an obstacle for this teammate. As we went through the airport on our way home, our group was expected to get to the boarding area by using a narrow escalator, something our team member could not do.

We eventually found an elevator. But when we arrived at the gate level, we encountered a corridor blocked by a locked door. We eventually found someone who had a key to this door, but we were left with the impression that this airport employee believed that people in wheelchairs should not be traveling.

Followers of Christ agree that we should show respect and compassion to our neighbors who have a physical or mental disability, or both. However, this was not necessarily the outlook in Jesus' day. Many believed that suffering was God's punishment for sin (see Luke 13:1–5; John 9:2), and those people with disabilities were treated accordingly.

B. Lesson Context

Acts 2:42–47 summarizes the ongoing activities of the just-birthered church in Jerusalem, which included miraculous displays after the Day of Pentecost. Those ongoing displays are described as being “many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Hebrews 2:4 confirms God to be the one who authenticated the truth of the gospel preaching by “signs, wonders and various miracles.” Although miraculous healings obviously brought compassionate relief to the afflicted, their primary purpose was to validate the truth of Christianity in general and the person and work of Jesus in particular (see John 20:30–31). Today's lesson forms part of that larger tapestry.

We are not told exactly how long the events of today's lesson occurred after the Day of Pentecost, but it was probably several weeks later. The church had been busy, including a ministry of the selling of property to provide funds for relief of the poor (Acts 2:45). The apostles were still in Jerusalem, not having returned home to Galilee. They and the other followers of Jesus met daily in the spacious porticoes of the temple (2:46a). Activities included meeting in homes for breaking bread—fellowship meals that included celebration of the Lord's Supper (2:46b).

I. The Setting (Acts 3:1–2)

A. Afternoon Prayers (v. 1)

1. One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

We are presented with a daily custom of *prayer* that occurred at a specific time of day. We should remember that all the believers at this point were of Jewish background—there were no Gentile Christians until the events of Acts 10. Belief in Jesus and his resurrection did not cause *Peter and John* to abandon all Jewish practices; the same was true later for the apostle Paul (Acts 21:26; etc.).

Prayer had been important before, and it still was. Three traditional times for prayer at the temple were recognized: early morning when the priests made the daily sacrifice, in midafternoon, and at sunset (Exodus 29:38–39; Psalm 55:17). This is the second of those, *at three in the afternoon* (see also Acts 10:3, 30).

The fact that Peter and John went *up to the temple* indicates that its location in Jerusalem was at a higher elevation than the house where they were staying. These two apostles are mentioned together in the same verse a total of eight times in the book of Acts. Four of those times are in today's text; the other four are in Acts 1:13; 4:13, 19; and 8:14. Before their journey was interrupted, these two men surely recalled the words of Jesus: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17, citing Isaiah 56:7).

B. Daily Station (v. 2)

2. Now a man who was lame 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.

People suffering from disabilities were a common sight in the ancient world (compare Matthew 15:30), and no less so in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12–16; etc.). For someone to have been *lame from birth* indicates a congenital condition rather than a tragic accident (compare John 9:1, 32; Acts 14:8). The legs of this *certain man* had never been able to support his weight and allow him to walk.

Although his physical condition was terrible, he did have two things going for him. First, he had family members or friends who were willing carry him to the temple *every day*. Second, he had a prime, high-traffic place that seems to be recognized as his right; the exact opposite seems to be the case with the man in John 5:7. This particular *gate called Beautiful* (again at Acts 3:10, below) is usually understood to have been on the eastern side of *the temple*. (Some see it as having been the eastern gate for the inner courtyard.)

II. The Expectations

(Acts 3:3–6a)

A. Innocent Asking (v. 3)

3. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

The book of Acts sets up a collision course: two men going into the temple hear a beggar's request. This man confronted everyone who entered by this gate, just by his presence alone. *Peter and John* may have seen him before.

The Greek word translated *money* occurs 13 times in the New Testament (Matthew 6:2, 3, 4; Luke 11:41; 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3, 10; 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31; 24:17); it refers to a duty-driven monetary gift to the poor and needy. Jesus never renounced the practice of giving to the poor, but he did condemn those who made a show of their giving to garner praise and honor (Matthew 6:2–4). Peter and John had no doubt given to beggars many times, both in Jerusalem and in their hometown.

B. Undivided Attention (vv. 4–5)

4–5. 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.

Peter, no longer the wishy-washy denier from Jesus' trials, spoke to the man with confidence. What Peter said first is interesting to compare with the previous verse, Acts 3:3. That verse indicates that the beggar had already seen the two apostles when Peter said, *Look at us*. Therefore the request by Peter wasn't for the man to do something entirely different but for him to do something more intensely. That extra intensity undoubtedly resulted in making eye contact. In any case, the two apostles gained the full attention of the man.

C. Forthright Admission (v. 6a)

6a. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have,

For unexplained reasons, neither *Peter* nor John had any coins. Peter expressed this in terms of precious metal coins (*silver* and *gold*), but we are given the impression that they did not have any copper coins either, not even a tiny bronze *lepton* (the "very small copper coins" of Luke 21:2).

To shirk one's duty to care for the needy by not giving alms violated at least the spirit of the law, which required the people of Israel to care for those who were in need (see Deuteronomy 26:12). Others observing at this busy gate would have seen the apostles' failure to give alms as being shamefully unprepared.

III. The Wonder

(Acts 3:6b–11)

A. Invoked Name (v. 6b)

6b. "but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

That is not the end of the story, though, for Peter did indeed have something precious to *give* this poor man: healing in the powerful *name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. Peter did not present himself as having miraculous powers (see also Acts 3:12; 10:26; 14:8–15). If the man were to *walk*, the power would come from his Lord.

Some have suggested that the man might not have wanted to be healed. They speculate that he was delivered daily to a prime spot for begging, perhaps a more lucrative gig than we might guess. This is to misunderstand the anguish of those with disabilities. Some do indeed rise above the limitations of their disability, but many with a disability would like to have it removed. It is important to acknowledge the unique stories of people with disabilities and not assume a universally applicable narrative.

B. Cured Man (vv. 7–8)

7. Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

Remember, this man had been disabled from birth. Thus his disability was not from disease or injury. He was not being "healed" or "restored," technically speaking, since he was being made whole for the first time in his life.

The detail of the man's being lifted *by the right hand* lends the sense of an eyewitness testimony. We further note that the right hand can indicate honor as the left hand indicates dishonor (see Matthew 25:31–46). The book of Acts presents this miracle not as providing missing body parts, but as fully empowering the man's *feet and ankles*, the focal point of his disability.

8. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

There is more here than having made this man's feet and ankles whole. He also learned to walk and jump instantly. Toddlers take months to learn to walk well and even longer to learn to hop about. Adults who have suffered traumatic injuries to the spine or legs can testify to the challenge of learning how to walk again. With this man on that day at the temple, the psychomotor controls in his brain instantly knew how to make his legs work. Not only could he walk; he could jump, which is an advanced stage of using legs and ankles. Leaping was not "stage two" for him; rather, it was the first thing he did!

The man's newfound physical abilities were accompanied by a sign of spiritual health: as he was *walking and jumping*, the man praised *God*. This would be appropriate 100 percent of the times such a miracle happened, but surprisingly it did not (compare and contrast Luke 17:15–18).

C. Amazed Crowds (vv. 9–11)

9–10. 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.

This man, now jumping about and happily *praising God*, was instantly recognized by those who frequented the temple courts. It is likely that he had only one set of clothes and one head covering. They had seen him many times, a beggar who had occupied a place at the *gate called Beautiful* for years. They had seen him so often and for so long that there was no doubt in their minds that he truly had been disabled and was now doing physical things that defied his disability. This caused *wonder and amazement* for them, for this could only have been the work of God (see Luke 5:26; compare and contrast with Acts 4:1–22 and 14:8–13).

11. While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

All the people who witnessed this miracle congregated in an area of the temple known as *Solomon's Colonnade*. This was a covered open-air area on the east side of the largest temple courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles. If the Beautiful Gate was on the outer wall (some think it is the eastern gate to the inner courtyard), then those entering the gate would turn left to access this area. Solomon's Porch is estimated to have been about 50 feet wide and maybe 100 to 150 feet long, with a wooden roof perched on marble columns that were 30 to 40 feet tall. The book of Acts presents this as a place where the Jerusalem church met at times (see Acts 5:12; compare and contrast 1 Kings 6:3; 7:12; John 10:23).

There is some debate about what kind of access those with disabilities would have had to the courts of the temple. We know that a priest serving in the inner courts could not be disabled according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 21:17–23). Whether this prohibition extended so far as to prevent a disabled person from entering the temple cannot be determined with certainty.

Imagine, though, if this were the case. The man had lain at the gate for years, but never been inside. His first move was not to return to his home and give the good news to his family, but to jump and leap his way into the house of the Lord, shouting praises as he entered (Acts 3:8, above). It was his greatest day.

Conclusion

A. The Ultimate Goal

Over half of Jesus' miracles recorded in the Gospels involved people who were sick, blind, mute, deaf, or otherwise suffering a physical disability. This does not count summary statements where we are told Jesus "healed many" (see Mark 1:34). He cared deeply about those with physical disabilities. A word used several times to describe Jesus' attitude and actions in this regard is "compassion" (see Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 8:2).

Compassion is also seen in the first-century church's acceptance of responsibility to care for those among them who were unable to care for themselves fully (Acts 2:45; 4:32–35; 6:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8–9; etc.). The ministries extended to those whose disabilities caused them to be marginalized or ignored by others. The church of today continues to recognize and respond to such a challenge. It does so in a variety of ways; examples are the establishment of hospitals, the design of buildings that have no physical barriers restricting access, and distribution of food via pantries.

Peter and John's care for the man in today's text gained the attention of others who were then eager to hear Peter's gospel message. We must conclude that was the ultimate intended result, the most important part, not the healing in and of itself. Physical disabilities last only for this life; spiritual disabilities are eternal. A church's care for those who have physical challenges should make the church attractive to unbelievers who become open to hearing the gospel and can thereby gain eternal life.

B. Some Surprising Results

I once directed a Christmas Eve service at a church by using a traditional "lessons and carols" approach. This meant we listened to readings of Scriptures about the Christmas story, interspersed with songs and hymns about Jesus' birth. One of the members of that church was blind. He had been born without the ability to discern any level of light. We asked him to be our reader that year.

He eagerly and gratefully accepted. More than my merely lining up someone to participate in a ministry, the offer turned out to be an act of service to him; he had never been asked to do any act of service in that church. He and his family arranged to have braille copies of the selected texts. He practiced diligently for several weeks. The result was a magnificent and memorable witness as our ministry to him resulted in his ministry and witness to others.

Another church I served had a man who was severely disabled; he was confined to a wheelchair and was barely able to talk. Knowing him to be a person of great faith, we asked him to be on the schedule to do communion meditations. He too practiced extensively. He was

somewhat difficult to understand, so we sometimes had his wife interpret his words to the congregation. Again, our ministry to him resulted in his ministry to others in ways few expected.

What guides you and your church in ministering to persons in your midst with disabilities? If you think you have no one like this, you are not looking hard enough. Don't just feel sorry for them. Find ways for them to serve! You will be surprised at the infectious nature of the bright smile of a greeter who is confined to a wheelchair. You will learn new things when a person with disabilities shares from Scripture. As you remember that such persons need the saving message of the gospel too, you will be surprised at how valuable the ministry *by* such persons is (compare Mark 5:18–20)! And you will be honoring the powerful name of Jesus.

C. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to anticipate great results as we minister to those who have unique needs. As we do, remind us that our compassion is not an end in and of itself. Rather, we make our obedience to Jesus complete by sharing the gospel, which leads to the eternal life that is available only through Jesus. We pray in his mighty name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Offer spiritual healing as you meet physical needs.¹
