

Acts 3

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[0 : 00] Nice chapter 3. I've got a confession to make.!

From what I gather, the auditions are the best bits. You never know when you click on them whether someone's going to be absolutely awful or breathtakingly brilliant.

Both are really good TV. Sometimes you could laugh out loud, other times you have tears streaming down your face. And they have something called the golden buzzer moment. That is that the judges in this kind of talent show, TV series, are committed to pressing the golden buzzer just once. And so you can click on YouTube and you can see the golden buzzer performances.

These are the ones that really blow the audience away, or they blow the judges away. As the person sings or does a magic trick or something, the audience or the judges are just gobsmacked.

[1 : 22] They are in awe. And the judges mouth to themselves, how on earth did that happen? What on earth is going on? And that's the question that's being asked in Acts chapter 3.

Peter and John do something utterly amazing. And many people see it and the audience want to know, how did they do it? What on earth is going on?

And unlike Britain's Got Talent, magicians or the great singers, Peter and John are more than happy to explain it to you.

And they're not magicians who keep their tricks secret. On the contrary, they relish the opportunity to tell people about it. How they healed a crippled man.

The passage breaks down into three parts. Verses 1 to 8, you have the healing. Verses 9 to 11, you have the reaction. And verses 12 to 26, you have the speech. The healing, verses 1 to 8.

[2 : 28] And I want to point out to you that the key characters in the narrative are seeking one thing but finding another. Peter and John, verse 1, they are seeking a time of prayer in their regular slot in the afternoon.

But they find another thing. Jewish people would go up to the temple to pray. And so Peter and John head to the temple for that purpose.

But before they get in, something stupendous happens. At the same time, there's a lame man whose legs don't work from birth. And he is at the temple gate. And he is seeking financial assistance.

He's been lame from birth. So every day he has to be carried to the same spot in the temple. And he's seeking finances.

Every day he's there begging. He couldn't work. There was no dole. No benefits. And so this was his only means of survival. And as he did every day, he pleaded with people going into the temple.

[3 : 37] He wanted money. But on this particular day, neither of these men found what they were looking for. Peter and John got to pray.

But they end up speaking to this guy and healing this man. And preaching a sermon to the crowd. They never made their prayers. And the crippled man doesn't get what he was after either.

He gets a lot more. He sought a few coins. But Peter and John do not have coins to give him. But what they do have, they share with him freely. They have the power of Jesus to make him well again.

And not in his wildest dreams that morning did that guy imagine this was possible. You notice he's not sitting at the temple gate asking people as they come in, Can you heal me?

He's not even entertaining that option. It's not even on his radar. He is asking for as much as he thought he could hope for. Enough money to buy dinner that night.

[4 : 39] But in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, on this day he finds the ability to walk again. And in an instant his begging days are gone.

So he jumps. And he walks. And he leaps. And he praises God. And then he jumps around a little bit more. And he hops. And he skips. And he praises God. And the people saw the walking and the leaping and the praising God and the hopping and the skipping. And verses 8 and 9, those verses are filled, aren't they? Telling us with what this man did. And they're repeated over and over again to make the point. The lame man from birth did not just take tentative steps with a frame and collapse in relief. He's completely healed. No physiotherapy. Verse 7 says his feet and his ankles became strong again.

[5 : 48] No rehab. How? By the power of Jesus. We remember, don't we, Jesus while he was still on earth doing miracles like this all the time.

But it turns out he is continuing to do them here. Even now that he has ascended into the heavens, he is still doing them by granting his apostles his authority to carry out his ministry. And it's not surprising, is it, that the people, they are taken aback by this. So secondly, the reaction, verses 9 to 11. Let me remind you, verse 9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they recognised him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. This is a first century golden buzzer moment. The people who witnessed it are gobsmacked. What they saw really blew them away. They knew this guy.

[7 : 02] He was well known. He was the beggar out the front of the temple every day. They'd seen him for months, for weeks, for years maybe.

But now he's out the front of the temple dancing and leaping and praising God. And the turnaround is miraculous, literally. And so they are filled with wonder and amazement and astonishment. And Luke piles on the words to capture their surprise. But they're also curious. Peter and John were not magicians in this golden buzzer moment.

But they still left people asking, how does this happen? Wow, what is going on? How is this possible? And when Peter starts talking in verse 12, he acknowledges their surprise.

And he suggests you've reached the wrong conclusion. About who is responsible for it. Look at verse 12. When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, men of Israel, Why do you wonder at this?

[8 : 09] Or why do you stare at us? As though by our own power we have made him walk. And that takes us into point three, the speech. It's a five point sermon that Peter has got.

Point number one, power. Peter's speech begins by clarifying whose power it is that accomplished this miracle.

And as we've just seen, he begins by flatly denying that the power belonged to him or John.

Instead, verse 13, he starts to talk about Jesus. And he makes it very clear in verse 16 that it was by the power of Jesus that this moment came to pass.

Verse 16. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong. Whom you see and know. It is Jesus' name and faith comes through him.

That completely healed this guy. The power here is not the power of a couple of middle-aged Jewish men who've been heading to the temple to prayer. The power is the power of Jesus.

[9 : 20] It is the power that is in his name. And only in his name. But point two of Peter's sermon is rejected.

The power that accomplished this miracle. This power that you notice and you are drawn to. This power of the Lord Jesus you've actually rejected, he says.

Now, sooner does Peter start talking about Jesus, then he points out to the assembled crowd. He says, actually, you've got a history with this guy. This Jesus who healed the lame man is the Jesus who the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and the God of our forefathers has glorified.

But he says, prior to that, this Jesus was disowned and killed by the very people that Peter is speaking to on this occasion.

He uses, doesn't he, in verse 13, the word denied twice. In verse 13 and verse 14, they've rejected him. Though he was their countryman, though he was their Messiah, they denied him and handed him over.

[10 : 30] And they had him killed. The emphasis will become familiar by Peter in his preaching in Acts. Jesus is greatly honoured by God.

Jesus is glorified by God. But he is greatly dishonoured by man. Verse 15, there's an astonishing phrase, isn't it?

Can you see it? They killed the author of life. So evocative, isn't it? You cannot do anything worse than that.

You cannot be guilty of anything more horrific than that. To kill the author of life is the greatest sin of all time.

And Peter is not mincing his words, does he? Here you notice, they exchanged the life of the holy and the righteous one for a murderer. They killed the one who had himself given them life.

[11:39] They reject him. But that wasn't the whole story, was it? Because God has glorified him.

And God has raised him from the dead. Which is why despite their rejection of Jesus, Jesus is still at work doing things like giving this guy his legs back.

And so when we come to point three in Peter's sermon, he begins to try and help his hearers come to terms with what they've done. Listen to verse 17.

He says, now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance. That's the third point of the sermon. Peter's sermon is power.

Power. And then what was the second point? Rejected. The third point is ignorance.

[12:45] He doesn't mean that they weren't culpable, they weren't guilty. For what they've done. He clearly thinks they were. They've got a very serious case to answer.

But I think what he means is that when they killed the Lord Jesus, they were actually ignorant of who he really was. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do, Jesus cried on the cross. They were ignorant of the important place that Jesus had in the plans of God. As Peter says in verse 18, God was fulfilling everything that was said in the prophets, even when the Jews were putting him to death.

And clearly they didn't see that at the time. Clearly they didn't see that it was the author of life that they were putting to death. In these ways they acted in ignorance.

But he says to them, now is the time for ignorance no longer. That if you will now acknowledge who Jesus is and you will acknowledge his power. And you will see how central he is to God's purpose.

[13:54] Then what you need to do is repent. That's point four. Verse 19. Repent therefore. And turn again that your sins may be blotted out. That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Peter talks of Moses predicting the coming of another prophet who would be just like him. And he spoke of how important he would be. And that when he arrived people needed to listen to him. And Jesus is that prophet. He is the fulfilment of that prediction of Moses. So it is Jesus who should be listened to. And listening to Jesus is what true repentance is going to involve.

Now frankly I think that the sermon could possibly have finished there. Perfectly logical four point sermon. But in fact it's a five point sermon.

Because Peter has a point to make doesn't he about blessing. And here's the surprising conclusion. That Peter gives to the speech because of what he promises here. It's far more than what his hearers deserve.

[15:00] Look again at verse 19. He says if they repent of their sins. Their sins will be wiped out. Not just forgiven. Wiped out. God won't just turn away from his wrath.

He will actually remove their sins from them. He also says that if they repent they will experience times of refreshing from the Lord.

They'll be relieved of the burden of their guilt. And they will know freedom and joy. And that will come from being forgiven and made new before God.

And then he says that if they repent God will send the Messiah to them in verse 20. That he may send the Christ appointed for you. And I presume Peter there is speaking about the second coming of the Lord Jesus. In fact he goes on doesn't he to stress in verse 21.

That Jesus is going to wait in heaven until the time God has fixed him to return. Which we look forward to. The time he describes here as the restoration of all things.

[16:10] When God will press the reset button on his creation. And in all these ways Peter says repent of your sins and you will know the blessing of God. Your sins can be wiped out by the refreshment that you will enjoy from God.

And there is the hope of Christ's return and a renovated universe. And this blessing Peter is telling you and I is the fulfilment of all that God has promised before.

Let me just read to you the last paragraph of Peter's sermon. And listen for the language of blessing. Look at verse 24. And all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and those who came after him also proclaimed these days.

They were all looking forward to this. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers saying to Abraham. And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

And God having raised up his servant the Lord Jesus sent him to you first to bless you. By turning every one of you from your wickedness. And that word God spoke to the people through Peter all those generations ago is very significant for us this morning.

[17 : 21] Because he says through Abraham's offspring, through Jesus Christ all the earth will be blessed. All people. On earth. And when God raised up and sent his servant as he did here.

He did so to bless us by our turning from our sins and our wicked ways. And that means that the lives of those of us who have turned from our sin and trusted in Christ.

Are now lived in his name under his lordship. And so as we finish this morning I want to point out three aspects of this life in Christ.

This lordship of the Lord Jesus that I think are prominent in this verse. I want to conclude by saying something about the power of Jesus. And the forgiveness of Jesus.

And the worship of Jesus. First of all. The power of Jesus. We've seen a desperately needy man.

[18 : 34] Completely. And life changingly transformed. How did that happen? It happened by the power of Jesus. It was explicitly not done by the power of the apostles.

It was certainly not done by the power of the man himself. And it was not done by the power of any other person or spiritual being. Jesus claims this moment as his own.

And in this process he establishes another testimony to his power as if he needed it.

And this power of Jesus is important for us. And it's important for you and me and for the people around us. And I think this testimony from Acts chapter 3 of Jesus' power is one that we need to cure and absorb.

Because we know people, don't we, who are very unwell. And we might be, this morning, very unwell ourselves.

[19 : 47] And Jesus' power to heal has not changed. And we know people, don't we, whose circumstances in a range of ways seem utterly hopeless.

And intractable. Or perhaps our own circumstances are like that this morning. And Jesus' power to change our circumstances has not changed.

And has not diminished. And we are surrounded, we live in a city, don't we, of people who show very little interest in the message that is very precious to us.

And we can feel, Christians often feel very pessimistic about the possibility of people coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the power of Jesus to draw people to himself is as great as it's always been. And perhaps this morning you feel real despair about your spiritual state. You feel you've got these well-grooved habits, bad habits of repetitive sins that you find yourself falling into again and again.

[21 : 05] Or maybe it's persistent lukewarmness. Or lagging doubts. Or a seeming inability to make the changes that you need to make.

And the power of the Lord Jesus. To transform the people that he loves. Jesus has not changed. And is not diminished.

And is as real. And he can change us. And he can change those around us. And he can change our circumstances. And he can heal.

He can do that easily. Of course, some of you are getting a little bit nervous. Jesus, in his perfect purposes, may not always answer our prayers in the way that we hope.

But it will never be because he can't. No one else might be able to help us this morning, but he can. And we might be powerless on our own.

[22 : 15] But his power is very great. And he can. And our outlook and our attitude and our prayers need to be fused with that reality, mustn't they?

Perhaps especially our prayers. And I wonder whether we should start by praying that Jesus' power would today, and in our prayer meeting on Wednesday, elevate and recalibrate our prayers themselves.

That we might call out to God for the things that we and others need. With a deep trust in him, whatever he answers.

But with an unflinching belief that the Jesus we pray to is powerful. He's powerful to meet my every need.

And then some. Secondly, the forgiveness of Jesus. And this is really a subset of the power of Jesus. Because one of the things that Jesus is powerful to do is to forgive any sin.

[23 : 25] And I mean any sin. Because in Acts 3, it reminds us that Jesus can forgive the greatest of sins. And that if he can forgive the greatest sin, then he can certainly forgive the lesser sins too, can't he?

Remember that the people Peter preached to here rejected the Messiah. They pursued and denied Jesus. They killed the author of life.

They killed the author of life. You cannot get a greater sin than that. And so I don't care what you've done in your life this morning.

You could not possibly be guilty of a greater crime than the people in Acts 3. And yet it's to these people, these crucifiers of the Lord Jesus, that the promise of verse 19 is made.

And I find that staggering. I hope you do. Verse 19 really is the golden buzzer moment of this chapter actually.

[24 : 36] The healing is amazing. Don't get me wrong. But there's nothing more gobsmacking, is there, than that the killers of the author of life are told that their sins can be wiped out.

That's the most astonishing thing in Acts chapter 3. And if that offer is made to them, then who could possibly miss out?

Acts 3 reminds you and I that there is no sinner who, if they repent, can be disqualified from Christ's blessing. And anyone who repents can have their sins done away with.

And they will receive refreshing from the Lord. They will enjoy the relief of guilt being dealt with and sin's burden being taken off them.

And they can receive the lightness and the joy of complete and total forgiveness. Please be really clear on this.

[25 : 49] Be really clear on this. The promise is not that God will just stop being angry with you. He will, wonderfully.

The promise is that you will be cleansed of your sin. And that your sins will not only be forgiven, they will vanish in a purifying fountain of God's love.

It's like, isn't it, when you spill something on, I don't know, your suit or your dress.

And you scrub it and you cannot get it clean. But you take it to the dry cleaners. And you receive it back. And you can't believe it. It's gone. All sign of it is gone.

You say, you wouldn't even know it was there. That's the picture. It's given back to you. It was spoiled. It was ruined. But now you can wear it and you can rejoice in it.

[26 : 56] I don't know for certain, but I don't think we have any murderers in our congregation. We certainly don't have anyone who took an active role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

But we do have people in our church who have hated someone bitterly. We have people who have taken cruel revenge. We have people who have stolen.

We have people who have been unfaithful to their husbands or wives. We have people who have been abusive to their spouses and their children. We have people who have lied and kept on lying.

We have people who have coveted what others have. We have people who have been regularly drunk.

We have people who have given into anxiety or discontent. We have people who are greedy, selfish and proud.

[28 : 05] And for every sinner who has turned to Jesus Christ, their sins have been wiped away.

And forgiven by God. And forgotten. And that is astounding like nothing else is astounding.

And if that were not true, we'd be stuffed. But it is. We sing a hymn regularly, don't we? Which is a favourite to many of us before the throne of God above.

I was listening to it this morning. And a line of that hymn jumped out at me. That Jesus has made an end of all my sin. An end of all my sin.

And it's the thing I need more than anything else. And he's done it. And I'm astonished by it. And I hope you are too.

[29 : 10] In fact, I'm astonished into worship. And that's the final point. That's where I want to land this morning. Because the power of Jesus and the forgiveness of Jesus, when they're properly understood, will lead us into the worship of Jesus.

And it's a wonderful chapter, isn't it, for reminding us who Jesus is. And as we see who he is, and we understand what he's capable of, our love for him is stirred in proper praise.

And it rises up out of our hearts, and it spills out of our lips. And so let me remind you, some of the ways that Acts chapter 3 describes him, Jesus of Nazareth, the servant sent by God.

The holy and righteous one. The author of life. The Messiah. The great prophet to whom we must all listen.

That is who healed this man. That is who Peter proclaims. That is who they killed, but God raised him from death, and glorified him. And it is to him, that we all owe repentance.

[30 : 14] And it is him, that makes forgiveness possible. And the hope of a whole new world to come. And Acts 3 invites us into this this morning.

To come to him anew, and fall on our face before him, in humble worship. It invites you to leave here this morning, with a spring in your step, maybe even a leap, and a hop, and a skip.

Because we are full of praise, because we are like that lame man, who have found our lives being transformed, by Jesus the Messiah. And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up.

And immediately his feet, and his ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them. Walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Let's pray.