

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“The Keys to a Beautiful Life”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. 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. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 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.

Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”. 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. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 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.

‘The priests and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.’

Acts, 4:1-4, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The old time religion needs to become the new time religion because it is the all time religion. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do in our hearts and lives today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against great obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“THE KEYS TO A BEAUTIFUL LIFE”

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were ‘CLOTHED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH’. The infilling of the Holy Spirit transformed despairing doubters into dynamic disciples. This supernatural power energised them to become witnesses of Jesus Christ in a secular society. These first disciples were empowered to share the liberating truth of the Gospel and to reach out and touch human need. We should never be content to just sit in the premises, or to just stand on the promises, Pentecost enables us to reach out and touch the lives of others.

In his summary of the Early Christian Church, Luke wrote:

‘Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.’

Acts, 2:43, NIV

Why did Luke choose to chronicle this particular miracle?

This miracle led to preaching... Peter addressed the crowd and many people were converted. At the end of the day, the men numbered about five thousand.

This miracle led to persecution... Peter and John were arrested and threatened by the religious leaders of the day. The persecution of the Church had begun.

This miracle is a spiritual picture... The Christian Gospel shows how we identify with this crippled beggar, and it also shows how we can enter into a beautiful life.

When we consider this miracle and its effects, we discover the keys to a beautiful life...

1. THE MIRACLE THAT CONFRONTED THEM

‘Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”. 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. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.’

Acts, 3:6-8, NIV

This miracle was the healing of a man crippled from birth.

Think about the human tragedy of his story... His little feet had never developed properly. When other boys would go out to run and play, he had never learned or been able to stand. Many of his childhood moments would involve looking enviously at those playing around him. Later, when men went to work, there was no work that he could do. Every day his loving family and friends would carry him to the Temple Courts. As they went inside to worship and pray, the crippled man was left outside the Beautiful Gate, where he could only beg for a living.

This miracle was the healing of a man now forty years old.

He could not walk, he could not work, and because of the Law of Moses, he was forbidden access into the Temple, and so could not go in there to worship. We can only speculate concerning what effect this must have had on his heart. He could easily have been bitter. There

had never been a day in his life when he had not been a burden to somebody. All that was to change the day Peter and John walked by on their way to pray.

This miracle was much, much more than the crippled beggar expected.

When Peter told the man to look at him, the beggar thought he was going to receive something. He was right, but he was wrong. The beggar expected to be given money, but instead he experienced a miracle. The moment Peter had this man's attention he admitted his bankruptcy in material things. It was not that he opposed giving to the poor; he could not give what he did not possess. Then he demonstrated an amazing adequacy in the spiritual realm. Because he was full of Christ, he could give Jesus Christ. He simply gave what he had.

‘Jesus said, “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give”.’

Matthew, 10:7-8. NIV

This was a sign, a miracle with a message.

It would be a shame if all we see is a physical miracle. Whilst not denying the physical miracle, we acknowledge a grater miracle, a greater truth, which is evident in this sign. This man, who was born crippled, represents all of us who have been born morally and spiritually crippled by birth. What he needed was the touch of Almighty God, not merely in the physical realm, but also in the spiritual realm. Do not we all long for the touch of Almighty God on our lives?

When Jesus opened blinded eyes, the greater truth is that men are spiritually blind, and unless we are born again, we cannot even see the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus unstopped deaf ears, the greater miracle is that we need our spiritual ears unstopped because although we have ears, we do not always hear.

When Jesus raised the dead, the greater lesson is that we are dead in trespasses and sin and Jesus came that we might have life, and have life abundant.

We need to give people not just possessions, but the power of God.

When Jesus, through the Apostles, healed this man, what he was saying was that all of us need a touch from God to live a beautiful life. To walk the walk of God, to do the work of God, to worship God, to go through that beautiful gate of God, into the house of God, with the people of God, to have a beautiful life. Jesus wants to make something beautiful of your life today.

THIS MIRACLE COULD NOT BE REASONABLY DENIED

The people knew the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate. He had been there for years.

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

Acts, 3:11, NIV

THIS MIRACLE COULD NOT BE HUMANLY EXPLAINED

Peter did not want the credit for what had happened.

‘When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”’

Acts, 3:12, NIV

THIS MIRACLE COULD NOT BE LIGHTLY DISMISSED

Peter told the crowd that Jesus was responsible for all that had happened.

‘The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.’

Acts, 3:13, NIV

‘In an open-air meeting, a man was testifying how Jesus Christ had saved him and delivered him from this alcoholism and the old life that he had, and he was giving Jesus all the glory. There was a cynic in the crowd who shouted, “Oh, why don’t you just shut up. You’re just dreaming”. The cynic felt someone pull and tug at his coat, and looking down saw a beautiful little girl. She said, “Sir, that’s my daddy you’re talking about. You say my daddy is dreaming. Let me tell you about my daddy. My daddy used to be a drunk. He used to come home drunk. He used to hit my mother and she would cry most of the day. We didn’t have good clothes to wear because my daddy spent all of his money on booze. Sometimes I didn’t even have shoes to wear to school. But, look at these shoes now, look at this dress. My daddy has a good job. Over there is my Mother. She’s happy now. She doesn’t cry around the house now, she sings. Even when she’s ironing, my mother is happy now. And Jesus changed my daddy. And Jesus has changed our home. And if my daddy is dreaming, please don’t wake him up”.’


2. THE MURDER THAT CONDEMNED THEM

‘Peter said, “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this”.’

Acts, 3:14-15, NIV


Peter pointed his finger in their faces and accused them of murdering Jesus.


He reminded the crowd that when faced with the choice of reprieving Barabbas or Jesus, they had chosen to release a thief and a murderer and crucify the author of life. But the bigger picture is that Barabbas is a portrait and a picture of every unsaved man, woman, boy, and girl in this world.

 **Barabbas was a thief... are you going to claim that you are not a thief?**

If you have not given God the glory, then you are a thief. If you have not submitted your life to your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, then you have robbed him of the glory that is due to his holy name. As you live here on earth, as you walk God’s green earth, breath

God's pure air, enjoy God's sunshine, and receive God's rain, as you eat God's food, and God is your landlord and if you do not serve him, you have stolen from God. The Bible tells us that **'THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND EVERYTHING IN IT'**, and if you experience any part of it without giving thanksgiving and praise to him, you steal all of it from him.

 **Barabbas was an insurrectionist... are you going to claim that you are not a rebel?**
When you refuse God, when you refuse Christ, it is not merely that you miss a blessing. Unbelief is a clenched fist in the face of God. It says, "God, if there is a God, you're not big enough to make me serve you. I am my own god. I'm going to live my own life". There is rebellion against Almighty God, and the crime of the one without Christ is the crime of high treason against heaven's king.

 **Barabbas was a murderer... are you going to claim that you are not a murderer?**
When anyone chooses to reject Jesus, they kill the Son of God. But the cross was more than that. It was our sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. It was our hard hearts that drove in those nails. And, according to Peter that day, it was us who murdered him. We sing 'WERE YOU THERE WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED MY LORD?' but even if we were not there literally, our sins were there. The 'THEY' were not the Jews, the Romans, and the Religious Authorities, it was you and me – we are implicated in his murder.

People that made up the crowd that was in the Temple area that day are the same as the people who listen to us today. We who are religious, little dream or think about the crime that condemns us. But we are all sinners, we are all guilty, and we all have need of salvation.

Here sound three of the dominant notes of early Christian preaching...

The early preachers always stressed the crucifixion was the greatest crime in human history.
Whenever they spoke of it, there was a kind of shocked horror in their voices. They tried to stab men's minds with the realization of the sheer crime of the Cross. It is as if they said, "Look what sin can do".

The early preachers always stressed the vindication of the resurrection.
It is a simple fact that without the resurrection the Church would never have come into being. The resurrection was proof that Jesus was indestructible and he truly was Lord of life and of death. It was the final proof that behind Jesus there was God and therefore a power which nothing could stop.

The early preachers always stressed the power of the Risen Lord.
They never regarded themselves as the sources of power but only as channels of power. They were well aware of their limitations but were also well aware that there was no limitation to what the Risen Christ could do through them and with them.

Now we have considered the miracle working power of God, and complicity in the very death of Jesus, the stage is set for one of the greatest evangelistic messages ever preached...

3. THE MESSAGE THAT CONVERTED THEM

'Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.'

Acts, 4:4, NIV

What was the result of all of this?

The result was that perhaps 20,000 people came to Christ. We are told that many heard the message and believed, and the number of men was about 5,000.

How many women were there? How many children were there?

If you know anything about church, you know there is usually more women than men.

Women have a softer heart. Men are hard headed and hard hearted. I would imagine there were more than 5,000 women there. It does not mention anything about the children and if we should just simply say 5,000 men, 5,000 women and 10,000 children (two children for every man and woman) that is 20,000.

We marvel that 3,000 people were added to their number at Pentecost.

We marvel that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

We marvel that after a single healing and preaching service, 20,000 people were saved.

 **JESUS IS THE RISEN LORD**

"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."

Acts, 3:15, NIV

No one who will look at the facts can deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus was placed in the tomb, the religious leaders warned the Roman leaders that he spoke about being raised from the dead. They speculated that his disciples would steal the body. Therefore, the tomb was secured with a huge stone and sealed with a Roman seal – anyone breaking the seal would be sentenced to death. A battalion of Roman Soldiers was placed on duty to guard the tomb – a soldier who fell asleep would be sentenced to death.

When the ladies arrived at the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, the stone was rolled (blown) away. There were no soldiers to be seen anywhere. Jesus was alive. Despite all the precautions, he had risen. There was to be no official inquiry as to what happened to the body of Jesus. No one wanted to hear or consider the evidence. The soldiers were not killed. The whole thing was conveniently ignored by officialdom. But what did Jesus do?

'He showed himself and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.'

Acts, 1:3, NIV

 **JESUS IS THE RESIDING LORD**

“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.”

Acts, 3:16, NIV

A name implies much more than identification.

A name carries with it authority, reputation, and power. When somebody says, “You can use my name” you sincerely hope the name is worth using. If an order is given in the name of the President of the United States of America or the Prime Minister of Great Britain, those who receive the order know that they are obligated to obey. If you or I were to get into the Oval Office of the White House or the Cabinet Office in 10 Downing Street and were to issue orders nobody would take much attention because our names have no official authority behind them. However, **‘THE NAME OF JESUS’** has all authority behind it, it is **‘THE NAME ABOVE EVERYNAME’**.

‘THE NAME OF JESUS’ stands for his character, his nature.

Peter is claiming that Jesus did it. This mighty miracle was performed in the name of Jesus, in the nature of Jesus, in the power of Jesus. We do not worship an absentee Lord, Jesus is a residing Lord. Jesus is here. Jesus is present.



JESUS IS THE REDEEMING LORD

“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

Acts, 3:17-19, NIV

What happened to Jesus was a fulfilment of prophecy.

Scripture was fulfilled exactly as God had said it would be through the centuries. The consistency of Holy Scripture and the fulfilment of prophecy is one of the greatest proofs of the character, the deity, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter called his listeners to repentance.

The Greek word ‘METHANOIA’, translated ‘REPENTANCE’, means ‘A CHANGE OF MIND’.

Repentance requires a change in the way you think. Repentance is a change of mind about your self, about your sin, about the Saviour, about Satan. There has to be an heart attitude. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life.

‘Jesus said, “I tell you, unless you repent, you too will all perish”.’

Luke, 13:3, NIV

Repentance leads to refreshing.

When we repent, something beautiful is going to happen within our own lives. Do you want to experience ‘TIMES OF REFRESHING’? Do you want to experience ‘SEASONS OF BLESSING’? Do you want to experience ‘BETTER AND BRIGHTER DAYS FROM THE LORD’? There is one condition to this experience – ‘REPENT’!



JESUS IS THE RETURNING LORD

“That God may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

Acts, 3:20-21, NIV

Jesus is going to come and redeem us.

People sometimes wonder: What is this world coming to? The simple answer is that it is coming to Jesus. Even when the outlook is glum and dark, the uplook is always very bright. Heaven has received Jesus, but Jesus will come to take us where he now is.

What a day it will be when Jesus comes again.

The first time Jesus came, he came as a lamb; but when Jesus comes again, he is coming as the lion of the tribe of Judah.

The first time Jesus came, he came to redeem; but when Jesus comes again, he is coming to reign.

The first time Jesus came, they asked “where is he that is born king of the Jews”; but when Jesus comes again, he is coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and every knee will bow before him.

The first time Jesus came, they gave him a crown of thorns; but when Jesus comes again, he will wear a crown of glory.

The first time Jesus came, he came in poverty; but when Jesus comes again, he will come in power and glory.

The first time Jesus came, he had an escort of angels who pronounced his coming; but when Jesus comes again, he will come escorted with his saints.

The first time Jesus came, he came in meekness; but when Jesus comes again, he will come in majesty.

THE MIRACLE THAT CONFRONTED THEM

THE MURDER THAT CONDEMNED THEM

THE MESSAGE THAT CONVERTED THEM

Peter and John went to pray, they met a lame man on the way.

He asked them for alms and held out his palms,

And this is what Peter did say:

*Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee,
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*

He went walking and leaping and praising God,

Walking and leaping and praising God.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

Unknown, MP 199