

## **The Lame Shall Leap!**

### **Isaiah 35, Acts 3**

One Sunday morning a young man went to his local church, he had been a few times for weddings and at Christmas, he didn't believe all the weird stuff that was talked about at the church, but he did fancy one particular young lady in the choir. When he got there, he made sure he had a good view of the choir stalls, so as to be able to see the object of his desire, and also hopefully, get her to see him. As he was sitting in his seat, an usher came up to him and asked him, as he was there nice and early if he wouldn't mind doing the Bible reading for the day. The young man thought that this was a great opportunity to ensure that his beloved saw him in church and so readily agreed.

The service started, and a few hymns were sung, until, eventually, it came time for the young man to read, he went to the lectern and turned to the reading, that he had sensibly already bookmarked, since he knew he would not be able to turn to it quickly otherwise, then he began to read from John 10, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber."

The young man's heart started to pound as he read, this was him, he was standing reading the word under false pretences, shaking he went on until he got to verse 11, he read, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." He stopped, unable to go on, he turned to the Minister and said, "Is this true, is this what Jesus did?" The Minister was un-phased and simply replied "yes, why don't you thank him for it and invite Him into your life as we sing the next song".

The young man returned to his seat and worshiped the Lord His saviour. He went to church that morning looking for something, what he received was something very different but much, much better.

This is exactly what happened to the crippled man in the account we heard in our reading from Acts this morning. He went to the temple in search of money, much as he had done for many years before. He was well known in the place, he would have undoubtedly sat in the same place day after day, begging for money and undoubtedly receiving it. Many of the people going to prayer at the designated time of 3 in the afternoon would have assumed that by giving alms their prayers would be more favourably listened to. As though God were some sort of slot machine that if you do the right things He will answer your prayer! This is not, as we know, how prayer works.

That particular day something different happened, the crippled man asked Peter and John for money, much as he asked all who passed by. If he had known what we knew about how the believers were sharing everything together and how so few of

them had much personal wealth and certainly not the Apostles themselves, he probably wouldn't have bothered.

Peter and John now do something quite remarkable, they look straight at the man and insist that he look at them! I wonder why they did that? Perhaps it was so that they could see that he was truly crippled by looking into his eyes, or perhaps it was to ensure that he was listening to them, we will never know, but what we do know is that he did as he was told, presumably expecting some financial reward for his trouble, only to be greeted with the most amazing sentence, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

We know the rest, the man was helped up by the Apostles and not only walked but jumped and leaped, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold all of those years before. STOP!!!

Needless to say all of this jumping and leaping about caused a bit of stir in the temple courts, people came from all over the place to see what the fuss was all about, once again, just like on the day of Pentecost, the people looked on in amazement.

Peter, the good evangelist that he now is, takes the opportunity that has been given to him by the work of the Holy Spirit. Once again we see the Spirit drawing a crowd of people by performing some amazing sign or wonder, previously it was the believers speaking in other tongues, here it is the healing of a sick man, not just any sick man though, one that has been crippled from birth, and as such would have been stigmatised in the society of his day, stigmatised because of the sin that either he or his parents must have committed, or so the people believed.

The Spirit of Jesus heals the man, just as the man Jesus had healed so many during His time on earth. Peter, the humble Apostle, is very quick to point out that the miracle is not because he is anything special but because of the Spirit of Jesus at work through him and in the man.

Peter showed us the way the Spirit works through the life of the believing community that we now call the church. He showed us that it is through the name of Jesus that we must ask our prayers and claim the miracles that we desire to see in our own time. Peter told the crippled man to walk in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, it was not by any cleverness that Peter possessed, nor was it by some magical formulae that many people of the time believed in, we shall encounter this idea more in later sections. The power was, and is, in the name of Jesus. Other magicians would invoke great names in their miracles, but these so called miracles always left the person in greater bondage and misery than before. When Jesus comes, and heals, and works, the chains of bondage are broken, the prisoners are released, and fullness of life is experienced.

Peter now speaks to the crowd, he speaks to them in language they will understand; he speaks to them of things that they know. He shows them that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the one that they have been looking for, and waiting for, for all of this time. He shows them Jesus out of their own scripture as he described it, "But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer."

Peter spoke to the crowd of all the prophets going right back to Abraham himself. Peter was showing the crowd that Jesus was the one that the prophets had spoken of and had pointed to, just as he, Peter, now pointed to that same Jesus, the Jesus that was present both in the healing and in the sermon that Peter now brings.

Peter does not condemn his hearers; he acknowledges that they along with their leaders acted in ignorance. He offers them a way out of the mess that their lives are in, a way out of the guilt that they brought on themselves by condemning an innocent man. He tells them as he told them on the day of Pentecost to, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

This is what true repentance is; it is turning away from doing things the way that we want to do them and turning to God and seeking to do His will. As we do repent then we are promised times of refreshing.

**STOP!!!**

We all know that on the last day when Jesus returns those who are in Him will receive eternal refreshment, the promise here is that we can and should know some of that refreshment here and now. Just as a long cool drink on a hot summers day brings refreshment and rejuvenation, so the infilling of the Spirit at conversion, and at many other times, brings us the necessary refreshment into our spiritual lives.

Peter concludes his sermon in what must have seemed to his hearers at the time in a very peculiar way, he said to them, "And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." We see here an echo of the Pentecost sermon where Peter said, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off." Peter doesn't fully understand what he is saying at this point, it will be made clear to him when he meets Cornelius, but for now, he is speaking the words that the Spirit gives Him. The promise was not only for the Jews, indeed it had never been just for the Jews, the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 18 that all nations would be blessed through his offspring.

The Jews, you see, were called to be a light in a dark world; they were given God's laws to show a watching world how to live in relationship with God. Unfortunately they didn't understand, and so kept the light to themselves. The new people of God,

the new Israel, the church is also called to be a light to the world, we to have the law of God, but the law is now written on our hearts by the action of the Spirit working within us, as well as in the written revealed word that God had so graciously given us.

We live in the time of the Spirit, the church is only truly the church when it is controlled and guided by the Spirit of Jesus working in us and through us. The Father of all things is at work through His Spirit, on this Father's day it is good that we acknowledge our total dependence upon Him and His grace. It is through the son of God that we can know the Father and it through the Spirit of the Son that we come to know Jesus. It is through the Spirit of God that we receive our commissioning and our empowering to GO.

I finish with a couple of questions; the first is; have you ever met Jesus for yourself? Have you got a relationship with the one who gave Himself for you on the cross at Calvary? You see Christianity is not about being religious and following a set of rules, it is about having a living relationship with God Himself, a relationship made possible through the death and resurrection of His Son. Just coming to church and doing good things is not the answer, knowing Jesus and spending time with Him is the only way.

If you do know Jesus I would ask how refreshed you are feeling this morning, there are times in our journey when we feel dry and shrivelled, this is often because we have tried to do things in our strength and not allowed the Spirit to flow through us. The Spirit longs to refresh us and empower us for works of service, He is here waiting for you to call on Him and invite Him afresh into your life.

If you feel that either of these two questions applies to you, and I know in my Spirit that it does apply to some, don't leave this place without doing something about it, come and see me after the service and we will pray together and see what it is that The Lord wants to do in you and for you.