

One afternoon two men are to be seen walking calmly towards the temple. It is about three o'clock. In the Bible it says that it was about the ninth hour. It was then a time of prayer, when the priests offered up the evening sacrifice. Usually a very large number of people made their way to the Lord's house at this time. After offering the sacrifice the officiating priest would bless the assembled multitude. This afternoon also, then, many Jews are on the way to the house of prayer.

This is also the intention of these two men who are walking to the temple among the multitude to attend the evening service.

Who are these two men? ... Take a good look. Ah, we know them quite well. They are two of the disciples of the Lord Jesus. You can read their names in the third chapter of Acts. Peter and John are walking together like brethren. Very soon they arrive at the great buildings of the temple. They are about to step through the gate and enter the spacious forecourt.

But no, suddenly they stop. Now, why is that? ... Just take a look. There, by the temple gate lies a man, an afflicted man. God's Word tells us that he was lame. He had not received this disablement through an accident, but he had been thus helpless from his birth. He is now a man more than forty years old. Just think of that. Forty long wearisome years he had lain upon his bed. Without doubt he had a very sad childhood, for he could never run and jump or rough and tumble like other boys. Do you not think that he sometimes longed to join in with the games of those of his own age? ... To be sure he did! But he could never do so, for both his feet were lame. Other children later went out to work and so earned their living, but he could not do so, for he was always doomed to lie upon his bed, powerless to make provision for his own upkeep. The one thing he could do was ... to beg!

O, how frequently he must have been saddened, that he had to earn a living thus. Evidently he had some friends, and they carried him each morning to the gate of the temple.

This gate was called the "Beautiful". Some think that it was made all of copper and that that is why it was known as the "Beautiful Gate".

The reason why they brought him to that spot, was that so many people went in and out of the temple. There he had the best opportunity to obtain sufficient alms

~~alms~~ or gifts to provide for his keep. In the evening they would collect him again and take him back home. Day in, day out; year in, year out, it was always the same routine. What a ~~XXXX~~ monotonous, ~~■~~ uninteresting life this sufferer must have led.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem knew him well, for was he not daily to be seen at the temple gate? Whenever they attended God's house they saw him sitting there, if they entered by that gate. Sometimes they would give him something, but sometimes not. Of each one that came his way, he asked alms. And he was doing this, as was his custom, on this particular afternoon too.

Peter and John are approaching. Of them also he asks an alms. All at once the two apostles stand still. Peter and John look upon him with a searching gaze. Compassion fills their hearts.

"Look on us!" Peter commands him. He means: "Just look at us carefully."

The lame man obeys. He does not understand why he is asked to do so. Such a thing never happened as a rule. Generally the passers-by would quickly throw some money to him and hurry on at once. Why then must he look upon these strangers so particularly? ... But of course, he obeys, expecting this time some great gift. Is he to obtain something extra today? ... He just hopes so. Full of expectation he stares at the two men before him.

"Silver and gold have I none," Peter informs him.

Perhaps some slight sign of disappointment crossed the hopeful face of the cripple. That was just what he had been looking forward to.

"But such as I have," continues the apostle, "such as I have, give I thee."

What has Peter got then? ... Nothing! If he had had a few cakes of bread or a bottle of wine, then he would have given them. Empty handed they stand before the poor beggar. It would almost seem that Peter is making fun of him, for he cannot give him anything.

O, no? ... Then just listen! From the apostle's mouth come these emphatic words: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk!"

This command seems to be cruel, for surely the man cannot do so? That is something he has never been able to do all his life.

And yet ... O, just look! ... Peter stretches out his hand, grips the sufferer by his right hand, and lifts him up. The lameness in his feet disappears. The muscles in his ankles become strong. Slowly and with great difficulty the cripple stands up - No! That is not what is written! Just read it: "And he, leaping up!"

The healing is not a half measure, but complete. He is so completely restored that he enters with his benefactors, walking and leaping with happiness never known before, into the house of God. O, this he had never expected. For this he had never even asked. He had expected to get a little gold or silver, and instead he receives health and strength. That is a thousand times better.

Is it surprising that the man thanks Peter and John? ...

Wrong again! That is not what is written either. We read that he praised God! Not man, but God gets the honour for his restoration. He thus avows that God has bestowed upon him this great blessing through the means of Peter and John.

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Acts 3 vv.11-26.

Acts 4 vv.1-3.

Very soon afterwards there is a great stir in the court of the Lord's house. The assembled crowds are gathering around three men.

Who are these three men? ... You have the answer ready I am sure. They are Peter and John with the lame man, who is now healed.

The people realise what a great wonder has taken place. They are filled with astonishment, yes they are dismayed.

"How is it possible that this man can be healed? How has it come about?" Such questions arise within their hearts as they look from one to another. They begin to gaze upon Peter and John with looks full of awe and wonderment.

Peter sees this and says: "Why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" He tells them that he and John had not done it in their own strength, but through the name of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps a look of disbelief came into the eyes of the Jews. The Lord Jesus! Impossible! That cannot be. He is dead! He has been crucified!

But Peter continues full of fire, telling them that Jesus is not dead, and saying: "God ... hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate ... and desired a murderer (Barabbas) to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." He repeats that it is through Jesus' name that this man has been made perfectly sound.

Peter's words make an enormous impression. The Jews are again reminded of the terrible event which had recently taken place. Again they are reminded that

they have a murder upon their consciences. Many of them show signs of concern. Many bow their heads in shame.

But again Peter points out to them the hope of forgiveness. True, they have sinned deeply, but they are not yet without hope. They are still alive. The door of mercy is not yet closed.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted" Peter cries unto them, "that your sins may be blotted out."

It is as though he says: "O my people, acknowledge your sin, confess your guilt before God and plead with Him for pardon. He can yet hear you, it is not yet too late!"

In words like these the apostle addresses the great multitude.

The preaching is blessed by the Lord. Many have their guilt revealed to them in truth. Many believe on the Lord Jesus. Many learn to know Him as their Substitute and Saviour. The number of those who are turned to God, rises to five thousand. (This may mean "was" 5000 or "became" 5000. I read 8000 in effect) On the day of Pentecost three thousand were added and now the number has risen to five thousand. What a rich blessing.

The crowds listen with wrapt attention to Peter's ardent reasoning. But suddenly their attention is roughly distracted. Several elders and Sadducees are pressing through the crowd.

They have heard what has taken place and their hearts are filled with alarm. Alarm and hatred! Alarm, because their consciences accuse them. Hatred for the two men who are so bold to speak of the despised Nazarite. They resolve to put a stop to this. They look upon Peter and John in anger, and laying hands on them, take them away.

As the people dispersed, talking excitedly about what has happened, and as they return to their homes, the two apostles are shut up in ... the ~~xxx~~ prison. That is the reward for the good that they have done. How shameful! What wicked ingratitude.

Roughly they are thrust into a cell, the door is locked upon them and very soon they are alone. Not a sound disturbs the silence.

Acts 4 vv.5-31.

"By what power, or by what name have ye done this?"

With searching looks and threatening attitude the members of the Sanhedrin are interrogating Peter and John. The cripple who has been healed is also present.

Did he also spend the night in the prison? ...

It is the day after. In frantic haste the Sanhedrin has been called together to consider this startling case. When the council was complete they called the prisoners before them, and there the apostles now stand to answer the question put to them.

There is something menacing<sup>in</sup> the silence which now reigns.

And do not Peter and John tremble at the sight of the hostile looks which fall upon them from all directions? ... Tremble? ... No, not in the least! ...

Peter's eyes begin to sparkle and he answers fearlessly:

"Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by ~~xxx~~ what means he is made whole. ..."

Yes, if they had done something wicked, then it would not be surprising that they were to be examined. But they have in fact performed a good deed, and for this they are being brought to judgment. In Peter's words there really lies an accusation. But he continues:

"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand before you whole."

With these words Peter points to the restored cripple.

The apostle goes on to tell these elders of the Jewish people that if they are ever to be saved, they will have to believe in Jesus of Nazareth. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Even they, the members of the Sanhedrin, even they must learn to know Him as their Surety and Saviour, or otherwise they will be lost for ever.

But Peter. With what a rebuke does he reply to these mighty leaders. How does he dare thus to speak? Ah, it is the Holy Ghost which fills his soul, and that is why he tells the Sanhedrin the truth so fearlessly.

A deep silence follows these powerful words.

The members of the Sanhedrin really do not know how to answer. They are indeed amazed at the boldness of these two simple men, but they are speechless. Indeed, what can they say? A great wonder has taken place. That they cannot deny. All Jerusalem is talking about it.

They command the apostles and the restored cripple to leave the council chamber for a moment, and they obey at once.

As soon as the door is closed the elders confer one with another, saying: "What shall we do to these men?"

For them it is a surprisingly difficult question. The miracle has taken place. So, do you know what they decide? ... They will strictly forbid them to speak any more about Jesus of Nazareth. That Name must no more be mentioned. That Name must be forgotten. Yes, that is what they will do. They will force these men to keep ~~xx~~ silent.

Peter and John are called in again and then the elders command them in tones of enmity, that henceforth they are to keep silent about Jesus. So the apostles are no longer allowed to preach.

But Peter and John reply: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

There sit those pious and self-important Pharisees and Sadducees. Bitter hatred is boiling within them. O, if they did but dare, then they would stop these men's mouths for good. They would take good care that they could never speak again. They would gladly murder them. But they dare not. They fear the people. And so with further threatenings they dismiss the apostles. They are forced to let them go, for they can lay nothing to their charge. But their envy and bitterness increases as they watch the apostles depart.

And what of the two apostles? Were they frightened? ... O, no. They tell the others what has happened. They praise and glorify God. With one accord they lift up their voice to God and ask Him for strength and help in the coming struggle.

"Lord, behold their threatenings," they pray, "and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word." They have so much need of the Lord's help.

That heartfelt prayer is heard and answered by God. The place in which they are assembled is shaken. Whether this was by means of an earthquake or a mighty wind, we do not know. But God shows thereby that He has heard and answered the prayer of His servants.

Again they are filled with the Holy Ghost.

In spite of the threatenings of the Sanhedrin, they preach daily Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God.

Would you do that too, boys and girls? How many there are alas, who for fear of

the ridicule of their friends, forsake the service of the Lord. Many are ashamed to speak of the Lord Jesus. When swearing is heard, they remain silent. When God and His things are ridiculed, then they are silent. Why is that? ...

Well, ~~xx~~ many are afraid that they will be laughed at. Many fear the mockery, and hold their peace, or even worse, many even join in! Is it not awful? ... Do you join in too? ...

Do you know what the Lord Jesus has said? ... "Whosoever ... shall be ashamed of me and my words ...; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father..."

Give this your earnest thought. Ask the Lord to make you faithful.

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