

THE POWER OF GOD FOR SINNERS AND SAINTS  
ACTS 3

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Douglas Hyde was a member of the Communist Party in the United Kingdom. He left it in 1948. He converted to Catholicism, and later wrote about how the Communists were often more effective in using people than were the Catholics.

One story stands out. Douglas Hyde described Jim as **“the most unprepossessing man I had ever seen.”** He says, **“He was very short, grotesquely fat, with a flabby white face, a cast in one eye and, to make matters worse, a most distressing stutter.”** But Jim was willing to dedicate himself to the cause of Communism. He was willing to be trained. So Douglas Hyde set out to build up his confidence and to convince Jim that he was part of a great cause. He taught Jim about the basics of Communism.

He writes, **“I sent him to teach a beginners’ course and the people he taught were ordinary building workers like himself, drawn from the same building site.”** He told Jim, **“The whole art of teaching is to know just a little bit more than the people you are trying to teach.”** Jim did OK. Then Douglas Hyde convinced Jim that he needed to take a public speaking course. Jim, with his stutter, was petrified at first. But he did it. Because he had a speech disability, crowds actually seemed to be sympathetic toward him and give him their attention. His confidence increased.

Next Jim was prepared to take a leadership role in his trade union. He got classes in trade union history, trade union procedure, the history of the labor movement, and the rules from the government. Soon Jim had a top position in his local branch. Then he was elected to an area committee of the union. In time he became a national leader. According to Douglas Hyde, **“When he died a few years ago, his death was of sufficient importance to warrant a front-page report in the *Daily Worker* [the British Communist newspaper] and many of his fellow-workers and trade unionists followed his body to the crematorium.”**

Douglas Hyde concludes, **“The Communists show confidence in the Jims of the world where others ignore them. They demonstrate in practice all too frequently a greater faith than we in the human material that God puts into our hands.”**  
(*Dedication and Leadership*, Chapter 5, Douglas Hyde)

Certainly Jesus recognized the human potential that people have. The apostles whom He chose to lead His church did not outwardly appear to be the types to lead a religious movement. Still today He picks unusual people to be a part of, and to lead, His church. He picks drug addicts and alcoholics and prostitutes and convicts and former atheists. C. S. Lewis once wrote, **“There is... a reason why nasty people might be expected**

**to turn to Christ in greater numbers than nice ones. That was what people objected to about Christ during his life on earth: he seemed to attract ‘such awful people.’”** But unlike the Communists, Christians have a source of divine power that offers total transformation to sinners and saints alike. We find that power at work in the passage before us this morning.

In recent weeks we have been studying the history of the beginning of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts. We have seen in #2 how the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit caused them to miraculously speak in the native languages of the Jews who had come to Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman Empire for the Jewish feast. These Jews demanded an explanation for this unusual phenomenon. Peter stepped forward and told them about Jesus. The Holy Spirit convicted these Jews of their sin, and 3000 of them that day became baptized Christians.

Last week we saw how this early church began to grow and mature. The text indicated that one cause was the sovereign working of God. In v. 43 of #2 we read, **“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”**

In our passage today Luke gives us an example of this miraculous working of Jesus Christ at the hand of the apostles. It also sets up the first confrontation of the church with the religious and civil authorities. The passage also teaches us religious types something about our need for divine power.

I.

Let's look at the first ten verses of #3 and THE LESSON FOR THE HOPELESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE LESSON FOR THE HOPELESS) According to v. 1, **“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”** There were two times every day when there were prayer services at the temple. This one occurred at the time of the evening sacrifice, which was 3:00 in the afternoon. The other was in the morning. These early Christians were not only worshiping with each other. They were also continuing to worship with their fellow Jews in the temple.

Verse 2 introduces us to the hopeless man: **“And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.”** This was Jim. But this guy's situation was worse than that of Jim. He had a more severe physical disability than stuttering. He was lame. This led to an economic disability. He was unable to have normal gainful employment. He was a beggar. He also had a religious disability. He could not fully participate in worship in the temple.

In the Old Testament Book of Leviticus there is a description of a limitation which those with physical disabilities faced. (LEVITICUS 21:18) According to Leviticus #21 v. 18, **“For no one who has a blemish shall draw near [the tabernacle], a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long...”**

On this particular afternoon Peter and John came across this lame man who was being carried to the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg for alms from those going to the prayer service. (BEAUTIFUL GATE) There is some debate about which gate is referred to as the Beautiful Gate. That description does not otherwise appear in Jewish writings of this era. But most Bible scholars think that it refers to the gate noted in this picture which separated the Court of the Women from the Court of Israel, into which only Jewish men were allowed.

(NICANOR GATE) This gate is also known as the Nicanor Gate. The gate was made of brass and had been shipped from Alexandria upon the orders of King Herod. Supposedly it took twenty men just to open and close the doors.

It was near this gate that Peter and John met the lame man. This was a logical place to beg. Religious people going to worship in a religious system that taught concern for the poor were likely candidates for contributions. Judaism taught that giving alms to the poor gained favor with God. One of their writings from this era said, **“Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. .... For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into Darkness.”** (*Tobit 4:7, 10*)

(PROJECTOR OFF) As Peter and John came by, the lame man began to ask them for alms. But Peter said to him, **“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you... if you will make a donation to our ministry.”** No. “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you... if you come to our healing service tonight.” No. “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you... if you are willing to plant a seed of faith.” Peter did not use any of these lines.

According to v. 6, Peter declared, **“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”** The lame man did not seem to know Peter and John. He was apparently not a follower of Jesus. Having been in the habit of hanging around in the temple precincts, he may have seen or heard Jesus. He must have known something about Him. But there is no indication that he was a Jesus follower. When Peter commands him to walk, there is no hint in the text that he made an effort to respond in faith.

According to v. 7, **“And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.”** It doesn't seem to me that this guy had a chance to process what was going on. I don't get the sense that he exercised any faith. Peter pulled him up to his feet, and he was healed. It was the sovereign working of God. It is an example of the signs and wonders performed at the hands of the apostles.

So this guy started walking. Verse 8 tells us that he entered the temple and was walking and leaping and praising God. The lameness restriction was gone. This guy had never walked in his life. He probably had not been inside the temple proper. The next chapter

tells us that he was over forty years old. Whether one first walks at twelve months old or forty years old, walking is a learned activity. No one goes out and walks and jumps around the first time that he attempts the feat. But this guy did. It was truly a miracle. The fact that he did it for the first time in the temple caused quite a stir.

Before the time of Jesus there is no record in the history of Israel of such a healing. There are stories of people with leg problems being healed or having recovered. But there was no record of anyone having been born lame being healed, and Luke the physician was careful to note that this guy had been lame since birth.

Before Jesus ever arrived on the scene, the Jewish leaders had established several tests that they believed that anyone claiming to be the Messiah would have to meet in order to be identified as the real thing. Never since the time of Moses had a Jew been healed of leprosy. The prophets said that the Messiah would do that. Jesus did it. Never had a person who was blind since birth been healed. The religious leaders said that the Messiah would do it. Jesus also did it. Never had a man with lameness been healed of his problem. The Jews also said that the Messiah would do this. Jesus had done it.

There was a legitimate Biblical basis for these beliefs on the part of the religious leaders. Isaiah #35 spoke of the coming of the Messiah and God's kingdom. (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 35:5-6) Verses 5 & 6 say, **"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,/ and the ears of the deaf unstopped;/ 6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer..."**

Now Jesus was dead and gone. But was He really? Remember, Luke begins this book with a statement indicating that what Jesus began to do and teach continues. He continues His work through the Holy Spirit. He manifests His power in especially miraculous ways at the hands of the apostles. Clear evidence of this is the Messianic sign that He does through Peter in the healing of this lame man.

Jesus Christ continues to perform miracles today. But we should not be so surprised if we don't see some of the more amazing things done at the hands of the apostles taking place. (EPHESIANS 2:20) In Ephesians #2 v. 20 Paul spoke of the church **"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone..."** Once the foundation of the church was laid the need for apostles and their more miraculous signs also passed away.

(HEBREWS 2:3) In Hebrews #2 vv. 3 & 4 the author says, **"...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, (HEBREWS 2:4) while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."** The author speaks in the past tense. The implication is that even by the end of the first century many of the more miraculous signs had passed from the scene. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verses 9 & 10 in our passage tell us that the Jews who gathered for worship in the temple that day were filled with wonder and amazement at what they had seen. This was a miracle that their religious leaders said only the Messiah could do. He had just done it--- through His apostles. The stage was set for another sermon by Peter.

This lame man had expected a handout. But he got much more than he ever bargained for. His life was changed in an encounter with God's people and with God Himself. Unfortunately the Jews in this man's day had little more than handouts to offer him. The religious leadership had become morally and spiritually corrupt. When their own Messiah came, they not only failed to recognize Him, they had Him killed.

Unfortunately this religious inability is also true of many churches today. They care for the homeless. They give food to the hungry--- all of which is good. But some of them offer no power to change lives. All they have to offer is handouts.

Contrast this with Christian rehab groups like Teen Challenge or the prison ministries with which we have been involved. Some of them feed the poor and clothe the homeless. But they offer so much more. They introduce people to life-changing power, power that frees individuals from addictions and old habit patterns. They introduce people to the power of Christ. That same power is available to us as well.

II.

In vv. 11-26 we come to THE LESSON FOR THE RELIGIOUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE LESSON FOR THE RELIGIOUS) Verse 11 tells us, **“While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.”** This former lame man was a happy camper. I suspect that his healing created a considerable disturbance in the temple. So Peter and John may have decided to leave before the service even started.

(SOLOMON'S PORTICO 3) They retired to a part of the temple known as Solomon's Portico. Solomon's portico was the colonnaded area near the temple proper on the inside part of the wall that surrounded the entire temple courtyard. (SOLOMON'S PORTICO 2) It was located along the east wall of the temple courtyard. There will be later references in the Book of Acts to Christians meeting here. Just where along the wall the crowd gathered on this day we don't know.

(PROJECTOR OFF) When a miracle occurred on the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish people who witnessed it wanted an explanation from the followers of Jesus. The same thing happens now. The crowd wants to know how this lame man got healed. So Peter begins to preach. He immediately gives credit to Jesus. This was a bold and somewhat dangerous thing to do. For the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism that condemned Jesus to death, had its meeting nearby on the south side of the temple courtyard.

Peter does not just talk about Jesus, he accuses his Jewish listeners of bearing responsibility for His death. That was a rather bold thing to do. In most speech or preaching classes teachers will not recommend that you begin a speech by

antagonizing your audience. But Peter confronts the important issues head on. Before these listeners can receive spiritual help, they must recognize their need. They have to recognize their status as sinners.

Their sin is indeed great. For they had a part in killing the Messiah who came to deliver them. Some of these people had been present early on Good Friday morning when the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate with a request to have Him executed. Though Pilate wanted to release Him, they called for His crucifixion. As Peter says in v. 14, they asked for a murderer to be released instead of Jesus. According to v. 15, they **“killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”**

In v. 16 Peter explains that it is this same Jesus who healed the lame man. Faith was also involved. My reading of it is that it was the faith of Peter and John rather than any faith on the part of the lame man that produced this miraculous result.

Peter then softens his tone. He acknowledges that these people and their leaders acted in ignorance. Jesus said to His executioners, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”** Ignorance of truth is not a total excuse. But Jesus is willing to forgive.

One of the chief obstacles for these people to the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah was their preconception that the Messiah should be a conquering king. The Bible does indeed speak in those terms. When Jesus comes again, it will be as a conquering king. But the Scriptures also speak about a suffering Messiah. That notion was difficult for the Jews to accept. But Peter in v. 18 makes reference to the prophets who spoke of a suffering Messiah. Isaiah spoke of Him as a suffering servant. Peter referred to Him as a servant in v. 13.

In v. 19 the Apostle gets to the challenge. He calls upon his audience to repent. Several weeks ago we looked at Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost when he also called upon his Jewish audience to repent. There we saw that the root meaning of the original Greek word for “repent” means “to change one’s mind.” In the Bible the change usually involves a turning from sin to God. In this context it specifically refers to a change of mind about Jesus. Peter is talking about a need that these Jews have to change their verdict about Jesus. In v. 20 he says that the Lord has appointed Him as the Messiah. The evidence of God’s verdict about Jesus is witnessed in the fact that He raised Jesus from the dead. These Jews need to turn from their rejection of Jesus to faith in Him as the Messiah.

From this change of mind two things will result. One is the forgiveness of sins. Peter says that these people will have their sins “blotted out.” The original word for “blotted out” referred, among other things, to wiping ink off of a document. Ancient ink had no acid content. It did not bite into the papyrus or vellum that was used for writing materials. It stayed on the surface of the document. So a damp sponge could wipe the writing away. That kind of thing is what Peter says will happen to people who turn in faith to Jesus as the Messiah, as the deliverer not only of Israel but of all mankind. That

offer extends to people today just as it did in the first century. All of our sins are wiped away when, and if, we place our trust in Christ as our Savior. The Lord holds them against us no more.

It is a similar thing to the presidential pardons which have recently been issued by our current and past President. People of each party have not been so happy about the pardons issued by the leader of the other party. But the effect of the pardons is to wipe away the criminal penalty of the offenders.

The second thing that repentance from the Jews will produce, Peter says, is “times of refreshing.” In v. 21 he speaks of it as “restoring all the things.” The Hebrew Bible spoke of a time of great prosperity and peace and happiness that would be associated with the coming of Messiah’s kingdom upon the earth. The obstacle to the advent of this kingdom is Jewish unbelief. Israel as a whole has refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah. Indeed the Jewish leaders had Jesus killed. This was in accord with God’s plan as described in the prophets. But now, Peter says, the Jews have a chance to repent, to change their minds about Jesus, to accept Him as their Messiah. If the nation as a whole repents, the Messiah’s kingdom will come upon the earth, and the Messiah Himself will return.

We know from history that the nation as a whole did not accept this offer. But 2000 years later the offer and the promise still stand. Israel once again has its own nation. Some day the nation as a whole will turn to Jesus as its Messiah, and He will return to establish His kingdom upon the earth.

(PROJECTOR ON--- ROMANS 11:23) The Apostle Paul, speaking of Israel, said in Romans #11 v. 23, **“And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.”** Two verses later (ROMANS 11:25) he says, **“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** The next verse goes on to say that **“all Israel will be saved.”**

Those who hold to the theological position known as amillennialism claim that the promises made to Israel are now being fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the church. Israel rejected Jesus. So the Jews no longer have a special place in God’s future plan. These verses would seem to argue against that. A plain reading of these verses suggests that Israel will again be restored to a special place in God’s program. Just reading and watching the news these days would indicate that this will indeed be the case.

Back in v. 21 in our passage Peter said that this offer of blessing as the result of national repentance fits the predictions of the Hebrew prophets. (PROJECTOR OFF) He proceeds to talk about Moses’ statement in Deuteronomy 18 about a future unique prophet. Many of the Jews in Jesus’ day regarded this passage from Deuteronomy as referring to the Messiah. Peter takes that up and stresses the stakes that are involved in the decision his listeners make about Jesus. In v. 23 he says, **“And it shall be that**

**every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.”** The ultimate application of that penalty occurs after this earthly life. But it happens not only to resistant Jews of the first century. It will happen to us if we do not respond to Jesus.

There was also an earthly application of this divine punishment in the first century. Because the Jews as a whole continued in their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, the Lord used the pagan Romans to come into Judea in 70 AD and wipe out the nation. Thousands and thousands of people were killed. Hundreds of them were crucified on crosses outside of Jerusalem. The city itself was leveled, and the temple was destroyed.

Peter concludes his sermon with a reminder of the special status that Israel has enjoyed in the plan of God. Because of that privileged position his Jewish listeners have an added responsibility to respond in faith to Jesus

Peter's point is that these Jerusalem Jews need to change. They need the same power that changed the lame man. They are religious people. They have been the recipients of unique blessings from God. But they need to accept Jesus as their Messiah. If they do not, judgment will come.

The lame man, day after day, month after month, year after year, came to that temple in Jerusalem looking for alms. When he received them, he was content. Yet God had so much more for him. One day he encountered that life-changing power from God, and his life was never again the same.

The Jews likewise thought that they knew what they wanted. Most clamored for a Messiah who would free them from the Romans. They thought that political freedom and independence were what they really needed. But these religious people in truth needed so much more. They needed freedom from sin. They needed life-changing power. Jesus had come to offer them both.

We, too, think that we know what we need. If we just had a little more money, or a different job, or a different mate, or parents who were not so old-fashioned, or a solution to my health problem, then we would be content. If someone would just drop some alms into our hands, we would be satisfied. We may be religious like those first century Jews, but what we really need, perhaps, is to be changed ourselves. We need an encounter with the life-changing power of God. That comes from repentance, from changing our mind about Jesus. It come from trusting Him as our Savior. If you have never placed your faith in Him for eternal life and forgiveness of sins, I would encourage you to do so.

For us who have done that, our attitudes are sometimes little different than those of unbelievers. Our prayers can be limited to requests for more money, for new jobs, for more understanding family members, and for more things. The Bible does tell us to pray about all the concerns that we have on our minds. But perhaps we need to be changed.

Perhaps we need an encounter with the power of God. That only comes from a continuing exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus.

(PROJECTOR ON--- GEORGE WHITEFIELD) When George Whitefield went to Oxford University in the 1700s, he had a more disciplined and self-denying religious life than I have ever had. He not only had daily Bible studies and prayers, he also fasted regularly and gave up simple pleasures and even friends for the sake of being committed to God. Yet something still seemed to be missing. When he read John #3 which spoke of being born again and of knowing God in a personal way, he was not sure that it was true of him.

Then one day the wife of a man that George had been visiting regularly came to see him. The man had just been pulled from the Thames River where he had tried to kill himself. The guy had been put in jail. So George went to see him there. The wife was also present. George read to the two of them John #3 vv. 15 & 16 (JOHN 3:15-16): **"...whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

Upon hearing these words the woman cried out, **"I believe! I believe! I shall not perish because I believe in Him now. I am born again, I'm saved."** Her husband shook and then took his wife's hand and cried out, **"I am on the brink of hell."** Then a moment later his whole face changed, and he said, **"I see it, too. I'm saved! Oh joy, joy, joy!"**

George Whitefield was astonished. At that point he himself did not see it. Despite his religiosity, he had not yet experienced the life-changing power of God. But soon he did. He came to understand that it was not good works or religious devotion that made one right with God. Instead it was faith alone in Jesus and His work on the cross.

George Whitefield went on to become a great evangelist. He made seven trips to America, where he was instrumental in promoting what became known as the Great Awakening. He died on his seventh trip to the Colonies when he was in Massachusetts. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Is your life in need of change today? Perhaps what you need is an encounter with the life-changing power of God. Perhaps you need to repent. Perhaps you need to turn your will over to His will. He might do more good in your life than you ever imagined.