

Faith in Jesus

Acts 3:11-21

SS Lesson for 12/03/2017

Devotional Scripture: Heb 11:1-6

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reveals that Jesus is the Messiah spoken of by the prophets and why we should have **Faith in Jesus**. The **study's aim** is to know that salvation requires faith in the Messiah Jesus Christ. The **study's application** is to realize that a positive response to the gospel requires its clear presentation and explanation.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Acts 3:19

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

3:1. Apparently there were several times for **prayer** at the Jerusalem **temple**—9 A.M., 12 noon, and 3 P.M. Perhaps the hour of 3 P.M. is stated here because it helps explain 4:3.

3:2. The description of **a man crippled from birth** emphasizes his hopeless condition. He was more than 40 years old (4:22). People **carried him every day to the temple gate** named **Beautiful** so that he could **beg**. This may have been the eastern gate of the temple area that led from the court of the Gentiles into the women's court.

3:3-11. God's supernatural healing of the crippled man through **Peter and John** (v. 7), together with his exuberant response (v. 8), attracted a crowd amazed (**filled with wonder and amazement**) at what had taken place. They ran and assembled at **Solomon's Colonnade**, a portico of columns running the length of the east side of the outer court (cf. 5:12). Two other cripples were healed in Acts (9:32-34; 14:8-10).

3:12. **Peter** assessed the situation and used it as an opportunity to preach. His message included: (a) an explanation (vv. 12-16) and (b) an exhortation (vv. 17-26).

3:13-15. Peter attributed the power for healing to **Jesus**, here described as God's **Servant** (cf. v. 26; 4:27, 30). This term recalls the title "Servant of Yahweh" in Isaiah 42:1; 49:6-7; 52:13; 53:11. Interestingly forms of the verb **handed... over** (*paradidōmi*) are used twice in Isaiah 53:12 in the Septuagint. This lowly **Servant** (cf. Phil. 2:6-8) was exalted (**glorified**; cf. John 12:23; 17:1; Acts 2:33; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3-4, 8) by **the God of the Jews' ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** (cf. Gen. 32:9; Ex. 3:6, 16; Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:32). Peter emphasized with sledgehammer effect three contradictions in the people's conduct (3:13-15). First, he said the Jews demanded Christ's death when **Pilate... had decided to let Him go**. Second, the Jews **disowned the Holy and Righteous One** and demanded the release of **a murderer**. Third, Israel **killed the Author of life but God raised Him from the dead**. Peter's titles of Christ are interesting: "His **Servant Jesus**," "the **Holy and Righteous One**" (cf. Heb. 7:26), and "the **Author of life**" (cf. John 10:10). In the third title the irony is strong: they *killed* the *Author of life* but He was raised to *life* from the dead! (On Jesus' resurrection, see Acts 2:24. On **witnesses** of the Resurrection, see 2:32.)

3:16. The crippled man's **healing** came because of his **faith in the name of Jesus**. **Faith** was also evident in many of those whom Jesus healed (e.g., Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 17:19). In Bible times a person's **name** represented him and his characteristics. In Acts, Luke spoke of "the name" (of Jesus) at least 33 times (cf. Acts 2:21, 38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18; 5:28, 40-41; etc.).

3:17-18. Peter's exhortation begins here. The people with their **leaders** (cf. Luke 23:13) had **acted in ignorance** (cf. Acts 17:30; Eph. 4:18; 1 Peter 1:14) in the sense that they did not recognize who Jesus really is. So God gave them further opportunity to repent. Though they crucified Him in ignorance, the suffering of **Christ** fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (cf. Acts 17:3; 26:23).

3:19-21. Peter's exhortation, as in his Pentecost sermon (2:38), was to **repent**. Was Peter saying here that if Israel repented, God's kingdom would have come to earth? This must be answered in the affirmative for several reasons: (1) The word **restore** (3:21) is related to the word "restore" in 1:6. In 3:21 it is in its noun form (*apokatastaseōs*), and in 1:6 it is a verb (*apokathistaneis*). Both occurrences anticipate the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (cf. Matt. 17:11; Mark 9:12). (2) The concept of restoration parallels regeneration when it is used of the kingdom (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:20-22). (3) The purpose clauses are different in Acts 3:19 and 20. In verse 19a **so that** translates *pros to* (some mss. have *eis to*) with the infinitive. This points to a near purpose. The two occurrences of **that** in verses 19b and 20 are translations

of a different construction (*hopōs* with subjunctive verbs), and refer to more remote purposes. Thus repentance would result in forgiveness of sins, the near purpose (v. 19a). Then if Israel as a whole would repent, a second more remote goal, the coming of the kingdom (**times of refreshing**) at the second coming of Christ) would be fulfilled. (4) The sending of **the Christ**, that is, Messiah (v. 20) meant the coming of the kingdom. (5) The Old Testament “foretold these days” (v. 24; cf. v. 21). The Old Testament **prophets** did not predict the church; to them it was a mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:1-6). But the prophets often spoke of the messianic golden age, that is, the Millennium. This offer of salvation and of the Millennium pointed both to God’s graciousness and to Israel’s unbelief. On the one hand God was giving the Jews an opportunity to repent after the sign of Christ’s resurrection. They had refused the “pre-Cross” Jesus; now they were being offered a post-Resurrection Messiah. On the other hand Peter’s words underscore Israel’s rejection. They had been given the sign of Jonah but still they refused to believe (cf. Luke 16:31). In a real sense this message confirmed Israel’s unbelief. Some Bible scholars oppose the view that the kingdom was offered by Peter. They do so on the basis of several objections: (1) Since God knew Israel would reject the offer, it was not a legitimate offer. But it was as genuine as the presentation of the gospel to any nonelect person. (2) This puts kingdom truth in the Church Age. However, church truth is found before the church began at Pentecost (cf. Matt. 16:18; 18:17; John 10:16; 14:20). (3) This view leads to ultradispensationalism. But this is not a necessary consequence if this offer is seen as *a transition within the Church Age*. Acts must be seen as a hinge book, a transition work bridging the work of Christ on earth with His work through the church on earth. In conclusion, Acts 3:17-21 shows that Israel’s repentance was to have had two purposes: (1) for *individual* Israelites there was forgiveness of sins, and (2) for *Israel as a nation* her Messiah would return to reign.

3:22-23. Here Jesus is portrayed as the “New Testament Moses” in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (cf. John 6:14). Christ will come not only with deliverance as Moses did, but He will also judge as Moses did (cf. Lev. 23:29 with Deut. 18:19; also cf. Num. 14:26-35).

3:24-25. Peter’s mention of **Samuel** as the next prophet after Moses (cf. 13:20) clearly implies that Joshua did not fulfill Deuteronomy 18:15. **All the prophets** (cf. Acts 3:18, 21) in one way or another wrote about **these days**, that is, the Messianic Age. The Jews were **heirs of the prophets of the Abrahamic Covenant** given to **Abraham** (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-8; 22:18) and confirmed to the Jews’ **fathers** (e.g., Isaac [Gen. 26:31]). The Jews then could be blessed if they, like Abraham, believed (cf. Rom. 3:28-29; 4:3; Gal. 3:6-7). In fact **all peoples** would **be blessed** through Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:3; Rom. 4:12, 16; Gal. 3:29; Eph. 3:6).

3:26. Jesus, God’s **Servant** (cf. v. 13; 4:27, 30), was **sent... first to you**, that is, to the Jews. This chronological pattern was followed throughout the Gospels and Acts (cf., e.g., Matt. 10:5; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). The reason for this is that the establishing of the kingdom depended and still depends on Israel’s response (cf. Matt. 23:39; Rom. 11:26).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Who do you rely on? Before you answer, consider the question on a deeper level. Every day, we rely on certain things. Whether we are conscious of it or not, it is true. For example, a child relies on parents to provide care. We go into work, trusting we still have a job. We rely on our homes and our spouses. There are numerous constants. We expect these things to remain. So what if this suddenly changes? What do we do when we lose that job, a spouse is unfaithful, or a disaster takes our homes? We find ourselves walking in a completely different landscape, trying to make sense of it all. We realize that we cannot depend on the things we thought would always be there. The temporary nature of this existence becomes painfully clear. Hope and life drain out of us, leaving us fearful and in despair. It does not have to be this way, as our lesson text this week illustrates. We read about three men. For one, faith changed his existence. For the other two, faith was a powerful motivator that saved others. Place yourself in the lesson text. The temple court is crowded with worshippers, merchants, priests, and beggars. Perhaps people are jostling one another, impatient to go about their day. In the midst of this, Peter and John work a miracle. Word spreads like ripples on the water. When Peter addresses the crowd, many come to faith in Christ. That is the way of the gospel. When we come into contact with Christ, we find ourselves astonished by His love. We are captivated by Him, changed through His Spirit working in us. Like the beggar, we come to Him with our defects and shortcomings, destitute and helpless. Even as the beggar was healed, so He heals us, transforming us into new beings. The means by which God works is the gift of faith. Scripture tells us that without faith we cannot please God {Heb. 11:6}. There is no other way. Faith is essential. We cannot please God by our stumbling efforts at good deeds and a righteous life (Isa. 64:6). But who are we supposed to

have faith in? We have to have faith in God's Son and His work on the Cross. It is that simple. God calls us to rely on the redemption secured by Him. Without Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, there is no redemption. Most people like to have a backup plan for when things go wrong. Besides salvation, there is no secondary way—no backup plan that can save. We either trust Christ, or we are not saved. It is all or nothing with Him. The good news is that when we place all our faith in Jesus, it is not misguided. He will not fail us. Unlike earthly things, His work cannot be swept away and destroyed. What He accomplished is eternal, and what He does for our lives is just as lasting. So where is your faith today? Deep inside, are you falling back on a secondary plan? Set that aside; it will not help you. Place your faith wholly in Jesus. He is the only one who will not let you down. While everything else is temporary, His promises are eternal (cf. Isa. 40:8) and good (cf. Jer. 29:11). Put your trust entirely in Christ.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The book of Acts narrates the history of Jesus' followers in the first generation following his death and resurrection. Written as a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke, Acts portrays the church as the continuation of God's work, in Jesus, to reclaim a people for himself from all nations (Acts 1:1, 8). God accomplishes this purpose as Christians testify to what they have seen and heard: that in fulfillment of God's promises, Jesus willingly surrendered to death and was raised to life again by God. The resurrected and ascended Jesus remained active through the words and deeds of his followers as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. The conflict between the Jewish council (also known as the Sanhedrin) and Jesus continued as persecution of Jesus' followers. The council consisted of the high priest and 70 leaders appointed by him. Under the watchful eye of the Roman overlords, the council supervised operations of the temple of Jerusalem and served as something of a combination legislature and judiciary. Members of the council had seen in Jesus a rival to council authority and vested interest (John 11:48). Thus council members had fomented the movement to put him to death, although the decision was not unanimous (Luke 20:19; 22:66-23:1, 50, 51). The people feared the council (John 7:13; etc.), but the council also feared the people (Mark 11:18, 32; Luke 20:19; 22:2; etc.). The center of the council's power was the temple. The temple was not merely a building; it was a 35-acre complex that included courtyards and semi-enclosed areas where people could gather. Jesus had taught in these environs (John 7:14, 28; etc.), and there his followers continued to teach and pray after his ascension (Acts 2:44-3:1). Immediately before today's text begins, the apostles Peter and John had come to the temple. As they did, they crossed paths with a man who was disabled and begging. Rather than give him money, Peter declared "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). The man's instantaneous healing was reminiscent of Jesus' own healing miracles (compare Luke 5:17-26; 6:6-11). The man then entered the temple courts on restored legs and praised God, by whose power he had been made whole (Acts 3:8). Today's text picks up as people reacted.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Faith in Jesus' Power (Acts 3:11-16)

11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.

12 So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.

14 But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

16 And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Power to heal (11-12)

Healing physically (Matt 14:14)

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Healing spiritually (Isa 53:5)

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Healing that proves His Divinity (Matt 11:2-5)

2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Healing based on obedience (2 Chron 7:14)

14 If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Healing through other people (Acts 9:10-11)

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Power of resurrection (13-15)

Resurrection witnessed by many (Acts 2:32)

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Resurrection that saints will be united with (Rom 6:5)

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Resurrection by the power of God (Acts 2:23-24)

23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Resurrection of the saints to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess 4:17)

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Resurrection that will result in change (1 Cor 15:52)

52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Power in His Name (16)

Power in His Name because it is one of the signs of those who believe (Mark 16:17-18)

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Power in His Name because it is the only power that heals (Acts 4:7-10)

7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Power in His Name but it cannot be used by human will (Acts 19:13-16)

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Power in His Name provides security (John 17:11-12)

11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Faith in Jesus' Salvation (Acts 3:17-21)

17 Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Salvation through suffering (17-18)

Jesus had to suffer so that He could be lifted up and honored (Luke 17:24-25)

24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Jesus learned obedience from His suffering (Heb 5:8)

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

Jesus suffered so that we could be holy through His blood (Heb 13:12)

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Jesus suffered to leave us an example (1 Peter 2:21)

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Salvation through forgiveness of sins (19-20)

It is a blessing to be forgiven (Rom 4:7-8)

7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.

We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us (Col 3:13)

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Forgiveness through the grace of God (Eph 1:7)

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Forgiveness through the shedding of Jesus' blood (Heb 9:22)

22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Salvation through restoration (21)

Restoration of the soul (Ps 23:3)

3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Restoration of faith (Luke 22:32)

32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Restoration from suffering (1 Peter 5:10)

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Restoration into righteousness (Job 33:26)

26 He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state.

Restoration of the joy of His salvation (Psalm 51:12)

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Restoration from backsliding (Jeremiah 3:22)

22 "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the Lord our God.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

What Lessons Should We Learn?

What are the lessons we should learn from Acts 3? Let me suggest several great, reassuring lessons for us:

Lesson One: Jesus is the Promised Messiah. Think of how these passages, along with our text, all point to Jesus as the Messiah:

4 Tell those who panic, "Look, your God comes to avenge! With divine retribution he comes to deliver you." 5 Then blind eyes will open, deaf ears will hear. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, the mute tongue will shout for joy; for water will flow in the desert, streams in the wilderness (Isaiah 35:4-6).

6 "In that day," says the Lord, "I will gather the lame, and assemble the outcasts whom I injured. 7 I will transform the lame into the nucleus of a new nation, and those far off into a mighty nation. The Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion, from that day forward and forevermore" (Micah 4:6-7).

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds Christ had done, he sent his disciples to ask a question: 3 "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Go tell John what you hear and see: 5 The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them. 6 Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (Matthew 11:2-6).

30 Then large crowds came to him bringing with them the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others. They laid them at his feet, and he healed them. 31 As a result, the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel (Matthew 15:30-31).

16 Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 4:19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read” (Luke 4:16-21).

As Peter said in Acts 2:22,

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know—“ (Acts 2:22).

Luke introduced the Book of Acts with these words:

1 I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about **all that Jesus began to do and teach** 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).

What Jesus began to do Himself, as Luke and the other Gospel writers record, He continued to do through His church. The healing of the lame man is proof that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is alive and at work through His apostles and His church. His words are words that we must hear and heed:

1 Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken through angels proved to be so firm that every violation or disobedience received its just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was first communicated through the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, 4 while God confirmed their witness with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Lesson Two: The Sovereignty of God. I am convinced that the Book of Acts is a record of the sovereign work of God through the working of His Spirit in the church. The story of the healing of the leper is but one example of the sovereignty of God. Think of how God had been preparing for this harvest of souls for more than 40 years. We know that God sovereignly fashions us while we are still in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Even the defects with this man’s feet and ankles were part of the divine design. For many years, the lame man lay at the temple gate begging for money. Almost everyone in Jerusalem had to know him, or at least recognize him. Every time they sought to enter the gate to the temple, he would cry out for money. Those years when Jesus could have healed him, He did not, for God had a better plan. It was His plan for Jesus to heal the lame man through the apostles. And as a result of his healing, the gospel was proclaimed and many believed. This man’s suffering was not a waste, and as we know, it was not punishment for his sins or the sins of his parents (see John 9:1-3; 11:1-4, 12-15). If I understand the text correctly, this man was healed by faith, and this would imply that he was not only healed physically, but spiritually as well. His momentary, light affliction was nothing compared to the glory that awaited him (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Surely we can say with Paul:

28 And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? 35 Or who has first given to God, that God needs to repay him? 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:33-36).

Lesson Three: God sovereignly prepares people to hear and to heed the gospel. Put differently, various circumstances provide the occasion to proclaim the gospel. As I look through the Book of Acts, I find that people are divinely prepared for the gospel. The people of Jerusalem were prepared for the preaching of Peter by the ministry of John the Baptist, and then by the ministry of our Lord. They were prepared by the supernatural events that accompanied the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. They were further prepared by Pentecost, and then by the healing of the man lame from the womb. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the prophecy of Isaiah and was ready for Philip to proclaim the gospel to him (Acts 8:26-40). Saul, later to be named Paul, was prepared in a variety of ways to trust in Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 9:1-19). The Philippian jailor was prepared by an earthquake to hear the gospel, but also by hearing the joyful response of Paul and Barnabas to their suffering (Acts 16:16-34).

In our text, the preaching of the gospel comes after a crowd gathers in response to the healing of the lame man. The danger for us would be to conclude that only miraculous and spectacular events prepare men and women to hear the gospel. Peter himself has something to say to us about this:

14 But in fact, if you happen to suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. But do not be terrified of them or be shaken. 15 But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess (1 Peter 3:14-15).

The world takes note when a Christian responds to adversity or persecution with hope and joy, rather than with bitterness or anger. The world is watching when we lose our job, or when one of our loved ones dies. The world is watching when we are content with a simple lifestyle so that we can support missions and those in need.

People are open to a message of hope when their life is shaken by disaster (flood, hurricane, earthquake, plane crash) or personal tragedy (the loss of a job, the death of a loved one). We need to be sensitive to those times when people are open to the gospel and to take advantage of the opportunities before us. We need to recognize that God orchestrates events to prepare the way for the gospel, just as He did with the lame man. Not only does God work from the outside in, through circumstances; God also works from the inside out, through the Holy Spirit.

Colin McDougall, a pastor at the Church of the Open Door in Glendora, California, told our church what happened when he returned to the United States after years of evangelism and church planting in Africa. In Africa, there was little privacy. Folks felt free to “drop in” at any time whatever. There were many opportunities to engage the lost and to share the gospel. But when they returned to California, they found that they hardly ever saw their neighbors. They would drive up to their garage, engage the garage door opener, safely within the sanctuary of their cars, behind darkly shaded windows, enter their garage, and close the door, all by remote control.

For some time, Colin reported, he attempted to devise schemes by which he could engage his neighbors. After very little success, Colin decided to change his tactics. He determined to spend the time he spent scheming in prayer, asking God to open doors of opportunity. Doors began to open, and opportunities appeared. Lost souls came to faith.

I am suggesting that we consider Colin’s counsel, and that we spend much more time praying that God would open doors for the gospel. We need to be alert to God’s answers to our prayers and seize the opportunity to engage our friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. God prepares the way for the gospel by employing a variety of circumstances. Let us look for these, and seize them, as Peter seized the opportunity to preach to this crowd at the temple.

Lesson Four: The gospel is both good news and bad news. Earlier I made the observation that Peter emphasized the specter of divine judgment in Acts 2, while he stressed the blessings of salvation in Acts 3. While one aspect of the gospel or the other may be emphasized, the gospel is no longer the gospel when we omit either aspect. The gospel is, at one and the same time, the good news and the bad news. Many try to “tempt” the lost to trust in Christ by omitting the bad news and highlighting the good. That is not the whole gospel. Others may speak only of judgment and damnation, without adequate emphasis on the love of God and the blessings of salvation. That is not the whole gospel either. The good news is that we need not face the bad news. Let us learn from Peter to preach the whole gospel, the bad news (Jesus is coming again to deal with His enemies, and we are the enemy) and the good (Jesus has borne our guilt and punishment and offers us His righteousness and eternal life).

Lesson Five: The blessing of unanswered prayer. All the lame man hoped and asked for was a few coins. What he got was much more – energized legs and eternal life. How often my prayers are like the request of the lame man. I tend to ask for too little; I tend to ask for material things. How gracious God was to decline his request and to give something far better in its place. Let us remember that as we pray. Let us seek the better things, and when God declines our request for lesser things, let us look to Him to give us what we need most.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-healing-lame-man-and-heralding-gospel-acts-31-26>)

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

"Repentance" is one of Scripture's great terms. Its Greek root connotes a change of direction or a turning around. Never used in isolation, it is always associated with recognition of sin; it means a change of heart, resulting in a change of mind and a change in lifestyle. This quarter's theme is "Faith in Action"—an active faith. Demonstrating His Person by authenticating signs, Christ offered the promised kingdom to Israel, but the nation rejected it and crucified Him. Immediately prior to His ascension (Acts 1:9-11; cf. Matt. 28:19-20), Christ gave the apostles the authority to perform authenticating signs to demonstrate that they were His legitimate representatives (cf. Heb. 2:3-4). Soon after Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter and John went to the temple (3:1), where they encountered a lame man whom they healed.

The people's adoration (Acts 3:11-12a). Now physically whole, the man latched on to Peter and John as the source of his healing. Ignorant of the apostles' source of power (cf. 1:8), the crowd also began to focus on them (cf. 14:8-18).

Peter's proclamation (Acts 3:12-16). However, Peter immediately diverted the crowd's focus. The explanation for this miracle was not to be found in the apostles themselves! Instead, Peter used this authenticating sign as an opportunity to fulfill his Lord's instructions (cf. 1:8). He reminded the crowd that God, whom they professed to own, had glorified His Servant Jesus—the One they had crucified! No doubt many in that crowd had been personal participants in the greatest crime of the ages. But though He had died, that rejected Jesus now lived—raised by the power of God—a fact to which they were witnesses. Throughout Scripture God is closely identified with His Name, and His Name is synonymous with His Person. Thus, when Peter stated that the miraculous cure was "through faith in his name" (Acts 3:16), he was declaring that what had just transpired was the direct work of the resurrected Christ!

The apostle's invitation (Acts 3:17-21). Peter's tone changed radically in verse 17. He highlighted both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in Christ's sacrificial death. God foretold and ordained Jesus' death; sinful man committed it (cf. 2:22-23). However, a remedy for their heinous sin was available. If they would repent—change their minds concerning the Person and work of the one they put to death, confess their sin, and begin to demonstrate a godly lifestyle—they would be forgiven, and the messianic kingdom would be established. Despite its magnitude, their sin was not beyond the scope of God's forgiving grace. It must be remembered that Peter was addressing national Israel (Acts 3:12). Her national repentance must precede Christ's second advent to establish His earthly kingdom (Rom. 11:25-27). However, just as repentant faith in their Messiah is a prerequisite for the establishment of Israel's promised millennial kingdom, repentant faith in Messiah Jesus is also required for salvation today (Acts 4:12).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Believers must remain alert and prepared to share the gospel at all times (Acts 3:11)
2. Depend on God's power for boldness to speak His truth {vss. 12-14}
3. A believer's message must focus on God and His power, not on self (vss. 15-16)
4. As we grow in Christ, our actions reflect a deeper knowledge of Him (vs. 17)
5. We trust God's Word because we know His record of keeping His promises (vs. 18)
6. Only God can both forgive and restore us (vss. 19-20)
7. Trust God's timing (vs. 21)