

Signs of Life: Compassion

Matthew 9:36-38, Acts 3:1-12

3/28/2026

Scripture

Acts 3:1-12 (NKJV) [1] Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. [2] And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; [3] who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. [4] And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." [5] So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. [6] Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." [7] And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. [8] So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. [9] And all the people saw him walking and praising God. [10] Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. [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?"

Scripture

Matthew 9:36-38 (NKJV): But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'

Most of us know the last half of this passage. The harvest is plentiful. We look around and see people everywhere who need Jesus.

MOTIVATION: But what motivated Christ's call to pray and to go into the harvest? It was His compassion for the people! Compassion for multitudes of men, women, and children who are weary and scattered, lost and wandering, living in shame and bondage. Those who are alone in this world with no shepherd to lead them through this mystery called life.

MOVED WITH COMPASSION: When you have the compassion of Jesus, it moves you! It is only when we can share God's heart that He will let us share in His work.

Custom

Compassion - To be moved as to one's bowels.

EXAMPLE: This might sound a little strange, but in ancient times, the mind was considered the seat of intellect, the heart the seat of emotion, and the bowels (below the stomach) the seat of love and pity. We might use the phrase, "My heart is sinking," or "In the pit of my stomach."

When Jesus saw lost people, people with a need that only He could fill, He was so moved with love for them that He physically felt pain in His stomach. Many times throughout scripture, when Jesus heals someone, feeds people, or teaches people, we see the preceding phrase, "Jesus, moved with compassion."

It's the same word used in the story of the prodigal son, describing the father when his rebellious son came back home.

Custom

2000 years ago, on what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus fulfilled prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, declaring Himself the true Messiah and rightful royal heir to David's throne. That day, people who should have been ready and receptive were unprepared and hardened. They missed their day and opportunity for deliverance. Though Jesus knew this would be the case, and God worked it according to His perfect plan, Jesus' heart broke. Luke 19 records:

Scripture

Luke 19:41-42 (NKJV) [41] Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, [42] saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

Jesus was filled with care, compassion, and a burden for the people He loved and came for.

Application

ApplicationI think that Jesus was trying to teach His disciples (and us subsequently) to see people the way He sees them. When the Holy Spirit's power comes upon you, and you look at people who were once annoying, once a nuisance, once nothing more to you than an avoidable obstacle, all of a sudden, you are moved to do what you can to bring them to Jesus.

CONTEXT: This is what happened after the day of Pentecost. After the Holy Spirit came, signs and wonders were being done, testifying to the message of the resurrected Jesus. In Acts 3, we see a story, one of many in the book of Acts, where the needs of people are met by Jesus through the compassion of His followers.

Let's look at 5 characteristics of a compassionate people.

Main Point

Compassion: Looks past religion

Scripture

Acts 3:1-2 (NKJV) [1] Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. [2] And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;

The difference between religious activity and true religion.

Peter and John were religious men. When I say religious, I don't mean it in a negative connotation. I mean that they were men devoted to the pursuit of God in truth. They were devoted to consistent prayer and study. They observed daily routines in this pursuit.

As Jewish boys, they would go to the temple three times a day: in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Even after Christ, they still committed themselves to many of these things, especially the times of prayer. Of course, they were now free from the law and from the obligation of a man-centered religious system. While they didn't participate in the Old Covenant system of worship, they still utilized the temple to worship God in truth. One commentator notes that they did not go to the hour of sacrifice, which was right before the 9th hour of prayer, because they knew Christ as their final and ultimate sacrifice. Now they could go to the temple and understand what it is really all about. They could read the Old Testament scriptures and see Christ. They could pray in the name of Jesus. They could even take the opportunity to preach about Jesus to other Jewish worshippers around them. This practice aligns with what we read in Acts 2:46, that they continued with one accord daily in the temple... But on this day, what was meant to be a moment of corporate worship transforms into an opportunity for public ministry.

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

"A mature Christian faith is one that pursues Christ within the four walls of a corporate gathering and then practices what it has obtained once it leaves."

Notice what happens as they are on their way to observe their time of prayer! They meet a man...

Scripture

Acts 3:2-3 (NKJV) [2] And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; [3] who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

His problemHis positionHis plea

A. His problem: Lameness

This might seem self-evident, but it's worth mentioning. This inability was all he knew. He had a condition that he had no control over, which he was born with.

It's worth mentioning that from the mother's womb, there is another disease that all men and women are born with and live with their entire lives: SIN. We are all SIN positive. And before God, that makes us truly lame. Lame in that we can't get up and come to God on our own. There was nothing we could do to meet our own spiritual needs or mend our broken spiritual condition.

B. His position: The Beautiful Gate

This was the first entrance gate that led to the court of the women. Beautiful Gate - The Jewish historian Josephus describes a gate made of fine Corinthian brass at the temple, seventy-five feet high with huge double doors, so beautiful that it greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold.'

Because this man was considered unclean due to his condition, he would daily sit outside the gate, distant from the worshipping crowd, and always wonder how wonderful it would be to go into the temple and worship.

This man's condition prevented him from having access to God. But religious people didn't help matters any. Religious people could only get him so far. We read that he was CARRIED and laid at the entrance, but could go no further. He had those who could try to bring some level of comfort to his condition, but he needed something more. This is why Jesus sent Peter and John to do what they did that day.

Quote

— William LaSor

"It is not the Church's business in this world to simply make the present condition more bearable; the task of the Church is to release here on earth the redemptive work of God in Christ."

THE PICTURE:

This is almost an ironic picture. At first glance, you would see something that man had made so beautifully (The ornate gate); then you would look down and see a life that man, in his best efforts, could not fix.

C. HIS PLEA: for money (asked for alms).

Of course, for him, it was the only avenue to stay alive. But how often are people crying out for anesthetics to ease the pain of their sick hearts, all because no one has gone to them and offered them the true cure... Jesus.

Application

I believe that there are people in this same condition today, yes, physically, but also spiritually. They are lame and unable to get the help they need. They are only carried so far by religion, but not into the heart of a relationship with God. They are willing to settle for some worldly alms when Jesus wants to offer them eternal riches.

Well, how did the disciples respond? I wonder how many times, before they received the power of the Spirit, they walked by this guy without giving him a second thought? This time was probably like every other, another poor person asking these two for money.

Do you know that many times what might appear to be inconvenient interruptions in our daily routine are actually divine appointments? What a blessing it is to run on God's timeframe and His itinerary.

EXAMPLES:

You might be in a real hurry to get somewhere, and God just told you to go help out the guy with a flat tire on the side of the Belt Highway because God wants to change that guy's life through you. You might be ready to put your headphones on and get a good snooze on the plane trip, and the girl next to you asks what that book is that you have in your seat. You might be ready to hurry home to the football game, and all of a sudden, you see your neighbor who is sitting alone on the curb because he just had a blowout with his wife, and God wants to change his life today.

Main Point

Compassion sees people through Christ's eyes

Scripture

Acts 3:4-5 (NKJV) [4] And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." [5] So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

The term here “fixing their eyes” means to look or stare steadfastly. They didn’t just glance over. They saw this guy, and they knew, “This is a man that God wants to touch through me.” They gazed at him; their hearts were wrenched with compassion and excitement. For a moment, they saw this man through the eyes of Jesus, and God allowed them to experience His heart for this man.

The command - LOOK AT US (Verse 4) - This was not a, “Hey, look at us, aren’t we pretty awesome! Peter and John, the healing apostolic ministry is in town, come buy your tickets so you can look at us!”

No, they wanted to see his eyes; They wanted to see what was in him underneath the surface, and they wanted him to see the love of Jesus in them.

He gave them his attention: Has anyone else noticed the progression of 'looking' that’s going on? Maybe I’m just weird like this, but it stuck out to me.

Verse 2 - he “saw” them going into the temple Verse 4 - they “fixed their eyes” on him and said “look at us.” Verse 5 - “he gave them his attention.”

The progression is getting increasingly personal as it goes. There’s something powerful about really being able to look into a person.

Expecting to receive something from them:

This guy was about to get a surprise! You see, what this man would have been content with was not what God wanted to give him. He thought he needed money; God knew he needed a supernatural touch from Christ. The healing was awesome, but the healing was simply a tool to bring him and many others to Jesus.

Application

Many people look to the church today to simply meet their physical needs. Give me money, get me out of this mess I’m in. While that can be a definite expression of the love of Jesus, it’s not really what they need! This man was content to stay lame and have a few coins, but Jesus wanted to radically transform his life. I believe this is one of the main reasons Grace Community Center is going into action... not simply so we can give people programs, sports, and opportunities, but so that through us, people might receive a supernatural touch from Jesus and have parts of them that no one has been able to fix healed!

Main Point

Compassion sees the true need (6)

Verse 6: Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'

When this man heard the first part of this statement, he was probably frustrated and upset. What were these guys doing, tricking him? Playing cruel games with a poor cripple?

Illustration

Try this one year when kids knock on your door while trick-or-treating. Say, "Candy and goodies I don't have..." Watch the look on their faces.

Silver and gold have I none - I don't think that statement would go over with the positive confession, name it and claim it, health and wealth crowd. This is an absolute negative confession!

But these two followers of Jesus possessed something far greater than a few bucks, and while their pocketbooks were empty, their spiritual bank account in Christ was full.

THE NAME: Jesus

Then he heard the name Jesus Christ. You can bet he knew this name. After all, this was the same spot where Jesus Himself walked many times (John 10). He probably saw Jesus heal others; he heard about all the miracles He was accomplishing, and yet how many times did Jesus walk by him? Why? Because God's timing is perfect. It was for this moment that God had planned for this man to be healed so that he could have a testimony and draw others to Christ.

WHAT I DO HAVE I GIVE TO YOU:

There is an important spiritual axiom here for every believer:

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

"You can't give away what you don't possess."

I love the faith and confidence these two men display. They were being filled and led by the Holy Spirit, and they knew it! This wasn't a self-willed statement. This wasn't them trying to believe it enough or muster up faith. This was a moment when the Spirit of God gave them the power, faith and authority they needed for the moment.

It's not that Peter and John were against having silver and gold, or that they were opposed to giving away money. The fact is, they weren't wealthy men, but in that moment, they had something much more valuable: the power and leading of the Holy Spirit and authority from Jesus Christ.

Illustration

Many of you have heard the proverbial true story of the humble monk Thomas Aquinas, who stumbled into a room where the Pope was counting coins. The Pope looked at him and said, "Well, we can no longer say silver and gold have we not." Thomas continued out the door as he said, "True, and neither can we say to a lame man in the name of Jesus rise up and walk."

THE POINT:

It is NOT that the presence of money voids the power of the Holy Spirit, or that the Holy Spirit can't use money to meet a need. In fact, Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to make a financial collection to help the struggling saints in Jerusalem and encourages the rich in Thessalonica to give generously and without reservation to meet the needs of the saints. But here is a principle that most of the church today has forgotten:

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

"If we don't possess the Spirit's power, everything else we possess loses its power."

If we do not possess the power of the Spirit and walk in faith, then it doesn't matter how much money this church does or doesn't have in its bank account. I refuse to operate as a pastor and as a church bound by financial fears!

I know that this is not the type of message one would preach when encouraging people to give their tithes and offerings, but there are more important things at stake here. Should you give? Of course. You should give cheerfully and generously as an act of worship because you have a God who is also generous in all that He gives. But you shouldn't give (I might get in trouble here) because the church needs your money to survive. Hey, if this church can't survive without money, we are lacking something far more necessary... The power of His Holy Spirit. If, when the money runs out, we can't say, "What we have we give to you" and watch Jesus transform a life, we have a major problem.

EXAMPLE:

I once had someone look at me and tell me in a congregational meeting, "We are leaving this church, and we are taking our tithe check with us!" Fine, what we need way more than your money is your life filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, making you a bold witness and changing other people's lives through you!

But this takes faith! Just to say it takes enough faith, but if I were Peter and the guy just stayed there after I said that, I would probably find a way to run and hide in the crowd so no one would see me. But true compassion:

Main Point

Compassion looks through eyes of faith

And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

(Very interesting that physician Luke uses specific medical terms here. These words for feet and ankle bones are found nowhere else in the New Testament. The words imply bones coming back into their sockets and being restored.)

So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Thank the Lord that these guys had the faith to follow through on the Spirit's leading! Thank the Lord the man had the faith to believe Jesus could heal him! Thank the Lord that He gives us faith when we need it and just asks us to respond!

I wonder if the words of Jesus were ringing in Peter's ears at this moment, as he remembered sinking after he attempted his walk on water... "Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Take note of the phrase LEAPING: It's not there by accident. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy:

Scripture

Isaiah 35:6 (NKJV): Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

Main Point

Compassion looks not for recognition

Scripture

Acts 3:11 (NKJV) [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.

He held on to Peter and John: Many times, it is natural for people who experience salvation and a changed life to connect it with the person who led them to Christ. They want to hang on to the pastor or to the leader or to the friend. While it is great to honor the vessel, it's important not to hang on to them at the risk of putting them above Jesus.

Peter responds to a gawking crowd by beginning his second gospel message. He begins it by turning everyone's eyes off of them.

Scripture

Acts 3:12 (NKJV) [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?"

He tells them a few verses down that the man was changed because of 'His faith in the name of Jesus.'

It's obvious from this story that Peter and John weren't in it for the money, they weren't in it for the praise, they weren't in it for popularity or power. All that mattered to them was that all eyes would be turned to Jesus. They saw a man through the compassionate eyes of Christ. They freely gave this man what God had given them, and his life was changed forever; ultimately, Jesus was glorified, and thousands more were added to the kingdom of God.

Scripture

Matthew 10:8 (NKJV) [8] Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

TODAY: Now I realize we don't frequently see miracles of this nature. They do happen, many times in areas of the world that lack the resources to seek healing any other way. But I believe the nature of the miracle is not the most important thing. I believe the bigger lesson is:

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

Jesus wants to miraculously touch people in need through Holy Spirit-empowered believers.

I love how Kent Hughes puts it:

Quote

— *Kent Hughes*

“The miracle was both literal and parabolic, because the Spirit-filled church dispenses more than care for the body—it brings healing to the soul. In place of spiritual lameness, there can be leaping!”

Today, we pride ourselves on our medical technology, which God has given and He uses to heal, but there are other things that humanity can't figure out. Humanity today can't successfully deal with addiction, depression, anxiety, depravity, evil hearts, and discontentment.

Think about how awesome it would be to be guided by the Spirit to a human being and be given at that moment the power of the Holy Spirit to look at them and say, “I have Jesus, and I want to give Him to you so that you can experience His life-transforming power.”

May the words of the apostle Paul be fulfilled among us:

Scripture

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV): Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

What happens next is amazing. Peter uses the miracle as a platform to preach the gospel yet again!