

“God’s Power to Change Lives”

Acts 3:1-26

The gospel of Jesus Christ results in life change. That is the consistent message throughout the New Testament, and it has been seen countless times again and again throughout church history. There is something about a changed life that fills the mind with wonder. I was recently reading the biography of Mitsuo Fuchida, the lead pilot for the Japanese who led the attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, it was Fuchida who led the first wave of 353 Japanese warplanes that attacked the American naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor, killing 2,403 servicemen. It was Mitsuo Fuchida who gave the now infamous signal, “Tora, Tora, Tora!” which served as the order to attack. The next day, the United States formally declared war on Japan and entered World War 2.

Fuchida served Japan throughout the war. On numerous occasions, he barely escaped death, such as having an emergency appendectomy that left him on the bridge of an aircraft carrier instead of flying a plane when the Americans attacked at the Battle of Midway. Or when he should have been in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945—the day the atomic bomb was dropped—but received orders at the last minute that put him in another city. He later said, “Life for me had no taste or meaning. I had missed death so many times, and for what? What did it all mean?”

After the war, a number of Japanese military brass were tried for war crimes relating to their treatment of prisoners of war. Fuchida was called on to testify, but felt the trials were a sham. He had harbored resentment toward the United States, and believed the Americans had treated Japanese POWs just as badly. It was then he met his former flight engineer, presumed to have died at the Battle of Midway, but had instead been taken prisoner.

But rather than telling a story of abuse and torture by the Americans, the man told him of a young American woman, Peggy Covell, who treated him with kindness even though Japanese soldiers had killed her missionary parents in the Philippines. Fuchida was astounded. In Shinto thought, the code of the warrior not only permitted revenge, but it demanded it. Yet this woman declined revenge and offered undeserved compassion to Japanese prisoners.

This sparked Fuchida's interest in Christianity. One day while waiting at a Tokyo railroad station, he was handed a gospel tract that told the story about another POW who had come to faith in Christ through reading the Bible while in captivity. In September 1949, after reading the Bible for himself, Mitsuo Fuchida became a Christian. "Looking back," he said later, "I can see now that the Lord had laid His hand upon me so that I might serve Him." His life was changed, and he told his story of how he came to Christ in his 1959 autobiography, "From Pearl Harbor to Calvary."

Let me tell you, a testimony of a changed life is a powerful thing, and every believer has one. Your testimony is the story of how Jesus Christ has saved you and changed you and made you new. The details of my testimony will be different than the details of your testimony, but there is a common thread that runs through every single one. That common thread is this—I was once lost in my sins, but Jesus came and found me and rescued me by His grace.

The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ to reconcile broken and helpless sinners to Himself. That is what happened in Acts. The second chapter closes with an amazing picture of the church, one in which the Lord is daily adding to their number those who were being saved. The believers had devoted themselves to doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and the prayers. Salvation in Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit meant a new way of life. They no longer lived for their own interests, but in the interests of the One who had

given His life for them. He now lived within them. Keep in mind what Luke has said:

Acts 1:1—“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...”

What follows is an account of how the apostles carried out the mission that Jesus started and gave to them once the Spirit came. The book is more than merely the ‘Acts’ of the apostles themselves—it is the record of the ‘Acts’ of the risen Jesus working through the apostles and the early church by His indwelling Spirit. Because they have the Spirit of Christ, they reach out just like He did. They see the value of one just like He did. Just as He had come to seek and to save the lost, they now make that their aim in life as well. Chapter 2 closes by mentioning the many who were being saved, but chapter 3 begins by focusing on the one. Those who reach the many care about reaching the one.

Let me tell you something right now, you are never just a nameless face in a crowd with the Lord. He looked on the crowds with compassion, but it is not just crowds that He is interested in. Jesus changes the lives of individual people.

In the third chapter of Acts, we are introduced to a broken man who was in desperate need of some change, but the change that he received was not the change he expected.

If you want to know what Christianity looks like in action, then the third chapter of Acts is a good place to start. It is here that we see the faith of the early church on display as they reach out to the world around them. It is the Spirit of God living in Peter and John who leads them to stop what they are doing and reach out to a man who had a great need. As a result, he has an encounter with the power of God that forever changes his life.

1—The PROFILE of a changed life (3:1-10)

“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour...”

The chapter begins with Peter and John ‘going up’ to the temple at the hour of prayer. The imperfect verb tense suggests that this was their daily custom, as was pointed out back up in 2:46. The temple was central to Jewish life. On their way, they encounter a man who is described as being lame from birth. Verse 2 says that the man was being carried, and he was laid daily at the gate of the temple that was known as the Beautiful Gate. Now, that would have been an ideal spot to beg alms from those who were coming to the temple to worship.

In first century Jerusalem, beggars could often be found at three locations—the houses of the rich (Luke 16:19-21), the main highways (Mark 10:46), and the temple. Of the three locations, the temple was optimal because of all the crowds who came. It also capitalized on the opportunities to ask for alms from those who wanted to impress God with their piety and generosity. Those coming to worship were more inclined to give to those in need.

Here in the opening verses of chapter 3, we’re introduced to a man whose name has remained anonymous to history. His story goes into chapter 4 where we find out that he was more than 40 years old. And while there isn’t a lot that we know about his life’s story, we can piece together a profile with what we’re able to read. To begin with:

He had a helpless condition

“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.”

Physically speaking, this man was in pitiful shape. Verse 2 says that he had been lame from birth, which meant that brokenness was all he knew in life. As a child, he had never known the joys of being able to run, skip, and play with other children. And as a man, he was dependent upon someone else to carry him. Not one time in his life had he ever been able to stand on his own two feet. We're told that every single day of his life, others carried him and laid him daily at the gate of the temple.

And then materially speaking, he was in pitiful shape. As someone dropped him off at the temple gate, he would spend the remainder of his day begging for 'alms.'

“Alms”—*comes from a word that means compassion or mercy; good will toward the miserable and the destitute*

Jesus used this word in passages such as:

Matthew 9:13—“**But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**”

Matthew 23:23—“**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; these are the things you should have done without leaving the others undone.**”

Asking for 'alms' meant asking for a little material mercy from someone else. In my mind, I can almost see him sitting there with a little mat, with a cardboard sign, and a tin cup. Each passerby potentially could have been someone who would show him a little compassion, a little mercy, a little grace. This was all he had to live for, all he knew. You're familiar with this kind of thing. You've seen it before, haven't you? Maybe at a busy intersection or at a bus terminal. Maybe

someone has come up to you in the parking lot of a shopping center and begged for a little something from you. How do you respond?

Spiritually speaking, he was also in pitiful shape. He had to have someone carry him every day to the 'Beautiful Gate' of the temple. It was called the 'beautiful' gate because of its ornate design. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says that it was made of Corinthian brass and took twenty men to open and close. The gate was located to the east of the temple complex, and it separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the women. As such, it was the gate that all of the Jewish worshipers had to pass through in order to go inside. This is where they placed this guy every day of his life. It was as far as he could ever go. Being someone who had been born with such a serious birth defect, Jewish law didn't permit him to enter in and serve.

Leviticus 21:18—“For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame...he may eat the bread of his God, but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he might not profane My sanctuaries.”

Now, initially it applied to the priests and the sons of Aaron.

Yet by the first century, protocol at Herod's temple meant that the lame were kept outside of the sanctuary totally. That's why this guy could get no further than outside the Beautiful Gate. The impression that we come away with as we look on his life is one of brokenness and alienation. To get anywhere at all, he is dependent upon someone else. To have anything at all, he is dependent upon someone else. Yet other people can only take him so far.

Now, I don't want to spiritualize this text, but this pitiful guy serves somewhat as a 'microcosm' of humanity. Broken and alienated—these are words that accurately describe humanity's fallen existence. It means that every part of man has been corrupted by sin. Spiritually, he is alienated from God. Sin has put up a barrier

between man and God. And there is nothing that he can do to overcome the barrier on his own. He can come only as far as the gate to life, but no further.

There are a lot of people who settle for life just outside the gate. They have a little bit of religion just to give them an appearance of righteousness. They may have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof. They may be close to the action on the inside, but they might as well be a million miles away because they are still on the outside. The religious sinner is just as lost as the irreligious sinner. There are no distinctions. You are either inside the gate, or you are outside of it. And no matter how hard you try, your problem is that you are spiritually paralyzed by sin. It has been true of you since birth. You are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are a sinner.

Psalm 51:5—“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

There has never been a time in your life when you were not a sinner. This is not just true of you, but it is true of every single person who has ever been born with the exception of just One. And this spiritual paralysis brought on by sin is why the world is in such pitiful, broken shape.

It is not human reform that the world is in need of—it is divine rescue. And yet man isn't looking to God for rescue; he is only interested in 'alms.' Temporary relief, momentary satisfaction. But what he needs is eternal life!

He had a powerful encounter

Verse 3 says that he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, and he asked to receive alms. Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” Now, I know you've encountered beggars at intersections or in different places. If you are not interested in giving them anything, usually your initial response is often to look in the opposite direction. That's not what Peter

does. Instead of looking away, Peter fixes his gaze on the man. He and John stop what they're doing and speak to the lame man, and verse 5 says:

“And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.”

The man expects to receive something from them by way of monetary value, but what he gets is of infinite value. In verse 6, Peter says, and I love the language of the KJV:

“Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”

The man wanted money, but he needed a miracle. He asked for alms, but he needed legs. He asked for some material 'mercy,' but he receives spiritual 'grace.' What Peter lacked in material wealth, he more than made up for in spiritual wealth. He had something far more valuable.

Spiritual riches are far more important than material riches. Jesus said, “Don't lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, where thieves break through and steal. Instead, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” He said, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, only to lose his soul?” Better to be spiritually rich and materially poor than to be materially rich and spiritually poor. This is a truth we often forget.

Back in the 12th century, it is said that Thomas Aquinas once visited Pope Innocent II at his palace in Rome. He was stunned by the opulence. The Pope was counting out a rather large mound of gold coins and turned to Aquinas and said, “You see, Thomas, the Church can no longer say, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’” Thomas replied, “That's true, but neither can she now say, ‘Rise up and walk.’”

Peter could say that because his authority is the 'name' of Jesus Christ. The phrase 'in the name of' means by virtue of someone's character or upon the

basis of his authority. To do something in the name of Jesus is to act consistent with His will, to do what He would do if He were here, to act with His authority and in His power. He is His ambassador.

Let me tell you, this is the special task that has been given to the church. God has commissioned us for this task of sharing with others what has been given to us in Christ.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones—*“The church is not here to talk politics, to play music, to give philosophical discourses, to produce art, to provide social commentary or psychological treatment. No, the business of the church is to deal with the real problem of men and women, not to give alms, but to offer a cure for their paralysis.”*

This is what makes the church different from any other organization on earth. People are lost in their sins. They need life within the soul. The answer is not found in a better environment, or in a better education, or a better economy. Knowledge is not his problem, neither is poverty. His problem is sin and paralysis of the soul.

Psalm 58:3—**“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.”**

Like a lame man sitting outside the temple gate, man can't stand on his own two feet. And for him to have any hope whatsoever, he needs to be made right with God. He is in need of a Savior, someone who can enter his world and pick him up, and overcome his spiritual paralysis. That is exactly what Peter does here in Acts 3. He doesn't give alms—he holds forth a cure.

He had a miraculous transformation

Verse 7 says that Peter took the lame man by the hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Leaping up, the man stood

on his own two feet and he immediately began to walk. God doesn't take half measures when it comes to changing lives. The man's paralysis was completely gone. He entered the temple with Peter and John for the first time in his life, "walking and leaping and praising God."

The man becomes a walking billboard of the power of God to change a life. What had been broken was now made whole. What was dead became full of life. It was a miracle that testified of the power and authority of Jesus Christ. In our efforts to reach others for Christ, we must never forget that people need a miracle. They are broken and ravaged by the effects of the fall, lost and in need of God's grace. Only God can save a person from the bondage of sin, and impart new life where there has been nothing but death.

A few years ago, there was a tragic story that came out in the news about a homeless man who had frozen to death while living under a railway bridge. He was discovered by some children who were sledding under the Union Pacific Railroad overpass. When state officials determined his identity, it was discovered that he was a long-lost relative of a reclusive and eccentric New York heiress by the name of Huguetta Clark. He was the half great-nephew of Clark, and tragically he was unaware that he was entitled to 7 percent of her \$300 million copper mining fortune. Millions could have been his, but he didn't know it.

What does this all mean for us? Listen—when you come to Christ, you don't just get some temporary relief. Rather, you receive an eternal cure. My sin, my guilt, my alienation has all been dealt with by Jesus at the cross. God the Son came to where I was—outside the gate. He took all of my sin and shame and bore the full weight of God's wrath in my place on the cross. I've inherited His infinite wealth!

Romans 5:6—“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

When I could not stand on my own two feet, Jesus came for me. When I was alienated from God, broken and undone, lost in my sin, Jesus died for me. When worldly alms was all I lived for, Jesus gave unmerited grace to me. He took my sin all the way into the grave, and then He rose again in power and victory, and He now has all authority. Having been reconciled to Him, I know that I will be saved by His endless life.

All of this can be true of you, as well. But you have to turn away from your sin and believe the gospel. This is why Paul could say:

Romans 5:1-2—“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

I have obtained access by faith into this grace in which I now stand. I’m crippled no more! Imagine you were there that day. I can almost see it in my mind. I can hear the song of the beggar as his voice is raised above the crowd:

“I’ve just began to live! I’ve just began to live! When God’s amazing grace came in, I’ve just began to live! Old things have passed away, I’ll have a brighter day! My name’s recorded up above, I’ve just began to live!”

What about you? Has the power of God truly changed your life and lifted you out of your spiritual paralysis? What about those you love?

2—The PLATFORM of a changed life (3:11-18)

“While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers,

glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And His name—by faith in His name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God has foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He thus fulfilled.”

The miracle became a platform for the message of the gospel. That was really the whole point. The healing of the lame man was a sign that authenticated the message that Peter preached. It was evidence that others could see that pointed to the power of God. And so a crowd began to gather and look on with amazement at the man whom they knew to be crippled, but here he was walking and leaping and praising God.

It resulted in an opportunity

Peter is sensitive to what’s going on and sees it as an opportunity to declare the gospel. There was no human explanation for the miracle of healing that had taken place, which is why Peter says what he does in verse 12:

“Why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made this man walk?”

His question serves as a rebuke. As those who claimed to know and worship the one true God, they know that He is a miracle working God. Miracles had played an important part of their history as God’s covenant people.

- parting of the Red Sea and wilderness provision
- ministries of Elijah and Elisha

More recently, they had witnessed the many miracles that punctuated the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. So why are they so astounded by this one? The reason is that they had denied Jesus and, in their unbelief, they rejected Him as God's Son. Peter is quick to point all of this out. He goes on to say in verse 13:

"The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus..."

He is showing them how the God of the patriarchs has now glorified His 'Servant,' a title that presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Messianic promise. Centuries before, God had said through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 52:13—"Behold, My Servant shall act wisely; He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted...His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations..."

And then the prophet goes into the 53rd chapter where He describes the work of the Servant:

1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

3 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

As the Righteous Servant of the Lord, Jesus was obedient to the Father's will, even to the point of dying on a cross as the sacrifice for sin. This is why Jesus had said of Himself, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to

give His life as a ransom for many.” For the reason, the Father has glorified the Son.

John MacArthur—*“There have been many false views of Jesus throughout history, from noble example to political revolutionary. Yet to imagine a Jesus who was not the Savior is as foolish as to imagine a Shakespeare who was not a writer, or a Rembrandt who was not a painter. His name is Jesus not because He is our example, guide, leader, or friend, though He is all those things. His name is Jesus because He is our Savior.”*

Peter says that the God of their fathers has glorified His Servant Jesus. Notice what he goes on to say in verse 13:

...whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”

And so Peter takes the crowd back to the day when Jesus was publicly crucified. They had denied the One who had come to save them and had asked instead for a murderer to be handed over to them in His place. By rejecting Jesus and demanding He be crucified, they killed the Author of life, the only One who can give life.

A lot of people have this idea that Jesus was nothing more than a good teacher, a religious leader and nothing more. But Peter tells the crowd in no uncertain terms that Jesus Christ is the Author of life.

“Author”—*translates a word that means prince or captain*

Hebrews 2:10—**“For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exists, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”**

Hebrews 12:2—“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus Christ is the Captain of our salvation, the author and perfecter of our faith, the source of life, the Lord of life, and there is no life apart from Him. It means that there is not one single square inch in the universe that is not under His authority. And yet this is the One they had rejected and handed over to be crucified.

It served as an object lesson

The miracle of healing of a man who had been lame from birth served as sufficient evidence that Jesus is Lord. The crowd should have remembered what the prophet Isaiah had foretold about the coming Messiah and His kingdom:

Isaiah 35:1-6—“They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God...the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; than shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

It was this same evidence that Jesus reminded John the Baptist of when he had been cast into prison. He wanted to know if Jesus was the One who had been promised, or if they should look for another. Jesus said:

Matthew 11:4-6—“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is to offended by Me.”

It is this same evidence that Peter draws the attention of the crowd to, and he says in verse 16:

“And His name—by faith in His name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

Peter says that it is Jesus alone who gets the credit for the change that had taken place in this man’s life. The faith that is through Jesus is what resulted in such a powerful display of healing—not Peter, not religion, not tradition. It is faith in Jesus and Jesus alone. Now, let me tell you what this means. It is not the faith of the lame man that is being referred to. Peter is referring to his own personal faith and the fact that Jesus is the One who gave Peter the authority. Remember, the man wasn’t looking for a miracle. He had done the same thing on that day that he had done for most of his life. But something was different about that day—it was the grace of God that came looking for him, and the power of God through Christ led to a dynamic change.

3—The POTENTIAL of a changed life (3:19-26)

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up His servant, sent Him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Do you know what Peter is doing here? He is confronting the crowd with the enormity of their sin. They needed to feel the weight of their sin and be confronted with the reality of their unbelief. No person will ever come to faith in Christ until he or she first feels the weight of sin crushing them. Until sin be bitter, Christ will never be sweet.

It is absolutely necessary to confront sinners with the fact of their sin. Otherwise, they'll see no need for repentance. Before God's Word gives me hope, it must first cut me deep. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.

Peter confronts them with their sin, but then he shows them how they could have hope. Look at verse 19:

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”

The gospel is not simply that ‘God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.’ That’s certainly true, but it is not the complete message. The gospel is the ‘good news’ that tells me God has done something to save me from my sin. I was born into this world under a sentence of death, estranged from God from my mother’s womb. I didn’t become a sinner somewhere along the way—I was conceived in sin, born in sin, and under the iron grip of sin. My sin deserved nothing but judgment from God. But, praise His name, He is rich in grace and mercy! So much so that He sent His own Son to die condemned in my place.

*I had a debt I could not pay,
He paid the debt He did not owe,
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand new song,
Amazing grace all day long,
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.*

*But that's not all, Christ lives in me!
I once was blind but now I see,
It pleased the Father to reveal the Son in me.
That I become the same as He,
Christ now is being formed in me,
Till all my death is swallowed up in victory!*

What a truth! Have you ever heard anything so good? I can assure you that you have not, nor will you. But apart from repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ, it does not apply.

Christian history is largely the story of God's power to change lives. That's what Christianity is all about. It is not about making you religious—it is about making you righteous. It is not about making you better—it is about making you brand new. The gospel is not merely an addition to a somewhat 'decent' life. You don't add Jesus to your life like a trophy. He is your life. You become His trophy of grace, one in which His saving power and life changing message is put on display for the world to see.

Just like the crippled man in Acts 3, men and women are sinners, broken in every way and separated from a holy God, and in desperate need of rescue. Jesus Christ is the Rescuer!

If you're not sure you are saved, then listen to Peter's appeal—repent and believe the gospel. Turn away from sin and self and trust in Christ.

For those of us who are saved and sure of it, how sensitive are you to spiritual needs of others around you? If it were you on your way to church, would a person in need cause you stop and go out of your way to reach out in Jesus' name? God help us see the value of one person, even if their brokenness is all we can see.