

Miracles and Messages of Mercy
Acts 3 and 4
September 16, 2025

The Change:

Before Christ's time on earth, there was the strict Mosaic law and a long list of rules and established religious leaders to follow and obey. Because humans can never achieve perfection or sinlessness, we were given the ultimate gift: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. The "establishment" did not take this good news well, and fought to keep the old ways. The book of Acts describes an incredible time of turbulence and conflict between the early church and the old establishment, at a time when Jesus' followers were sent to do and teach what Jesus did and taught, and the new church was growing rapidly.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:1-2

The Scene and the Need:

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!' So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them." Acts 3:1-5

Mercy and Caring for the Less Fortunate:

What are gleanings?

The Hebrew word for "glean" means "to collect, gather up, pick up." So when someone is "gleaning", they are picking up leftover grain or other harvested material left behind by reapers. In the bible, the Israelites were commanded to allow the poor to follow behind reapers and pick up leftover spears of grain and fallen grapes. In this way, the Law of Moses provided food for the poor, orphans, widows, and resident aliens. (GotQuestions.org)

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God." Leviticus 19:9-10.

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of the harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigners residing among you. I am the LORD your God." Leviticus 23:22

Things to note about the scene at the temple in Acts 3:

- Lame from birth – we live in an imperfect world where there is sickness and need
- The man was brought to the temple every day – people helped
- The law and social system were set up to care for those in need – people are expected to help

What does this tell us about the heart of God?

- Mercy and provision
- God sets forth laws to provide for those who are less fortunate, i.e. the poor and the foreigners
- Care and responsibility for others

Significance of the ninth hour: 3:00 pm:

The "Ninth Hour" has biblical significance, particularly in the context of Jewish and early Christian practices. The day was divided into twelve hours, starting at sunrise at 6:00 am; the ninth hour corresponds to 3:00 pm.

Theological Implications

The ninth hour holds deep theological significance as it is associated with moments of divine intervention, revelation, and fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. The cry of Jesus at the ninth hour on the cross is a profound expression of His human anguish and the weight of sin He bore for humanity. It also signifies the moment when the veil of the temple was torn, symbolizing the new access to God through Christ's sacrifice.

In the early church, the ninth hour continued to be a time of prayer and reflection, emphasizing the importance of regular communion with God. The events associated with this hour in the New Testament highlight the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, where the focus shifts from the temple rituals to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Cultural and Historical Context

Understanding the ninth hour within its cultural and historical context enriches the interpretation of these biblical events. The Jewish practice of prayer at set times of the day reflects a rhythm of life centered around worship and devotion. The early Christians, many of whom were Jewish, maintained these practices, integrating them with their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The ninth hour, therefore, serves as a reminder of the continuity and fulfillment of God's promises, the power of prayer, and the transformative impact of the Gospel message.

https://biblehub.com/topical/t/the_ninth_hour.htm

The Healing:

"Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." Acts 3:6-10

The Focus: Peter deflects the attention from himself to God and the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He calls them to repent and come to God for forgiveness and refreshment.

"While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: 'Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?'" Acts 3:11-12.

Peter testifies how God glorified His servant Jesus, and that Jesus was crucified, died, and that God raised him from the dead. Then he turns their attention to his faith in Jesus, saying, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him." Acts 3:16-17.

Peter calls them to repent and turn to God for forgiveness and refreshing: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus." Acts 3:19-20

Question: Have you ever struggled with pride, taking credit, or boasting when your efforts bore fruit? Is it hard to tell when this is happening? What is the antidote for this?

Question: Have you ever experienced a time when despite a difficult or painful situation, people got to know God better?

The Response of the Priests, Captain, Sadducees, Rulers, Elders and Teachers:

“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.” Acts 4:1-4

“The next day the rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem...They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’” Acts 4:5,7

The Response of Peter, John and the Church:

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 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. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:8-12

The leaders saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men; they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. They didn’t want them to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

“But Peter and John replied... ‘As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.” Acts 4:19-22

When Peter and John were released, they went back and told their own people what happened, and they focused on God, His word, and His power. They

- prayed
- acknowledged God’s sovereignty
- remembered and cited scripture where God spoke by the Holy Spirit through King David about how rulers would band up against the anointed one, and against Jesus
- asked God to enable them to speak with boldness
- asked God to “Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” Acts 4:23-29

They did not focus on themselves or their “opponents”. They did not

- seek revenge
- ruminate on the injustice or callousness of the leaders
- glorify themselves

The Response of the Holy Spirit:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31

More Responses of the Church in Acts 4:

- One heart and mind – unity
- No one claimed their possessions as their own – shared everything they had
- With great power they continued to testify to the resurrection of Jesus
- God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them, for from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

We have been called and commissioned to do and teach what the earliest Christians did: to bring messages of God’s mercy and proclaim Jesus. Matthew 28:19-20

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, we can live merciful lives that show God’s love, and tell them the good news that through Jesus, people can find salvation.

The Holy Spirit is our guide and mover in the task of sharing our faith and growing the church. We do not have to do this on our own power.

In Acts 1, Jesus tells his disciples the plan, and tells them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 1:4-5

“[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Question: Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit using a difficult situation to bring people to the Lord?

Question: Have you ever felt God calling you to do something that seemed hard or impossible, and did you ask the Holy Spirit to help guide and empower you? What happened?