

"Poor and Powerful"

3/17-18/07

6 p.m.; 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Acts 3:1-26; 4:4

OPEN to Acts 3:1 (**PAGE** 1694)**INTRODUCTION**

I was talking to a lady this week who is a part of a small group Bible Study and recently they've been challenged to be witnesses for Christ. She and the others in the group are accepting what God's word says about this, and, so, they're becoming more and more sensitive to opportunities God presents to them.

This one lady had finished a medical appt. And on her way out, she saw a young woman with a child. She was covered with a scarf and dressed like Muslim women do.

Their eyes met, and rather than turning away, she felt prompted to smile and say, "Hello!", so she did!

To her surprise, the young mother approached her and told her that she needed a ride to another medical clinic. Her child needed attention, her husband couldn't get off work, and she was stranded.

The church member drove her to the medical clinic, and when the Muslim lady said, "Thank you," she felt prompted to witness to her, so she said something like, "Jesus Christ has helped me many times in my life, so, I wanted to help you."

And then they parted ways.

That's what you call a Divine appointment. God arranged the appointment!

Today, as we look at Acts 3, we see something similar happening.

But, first we need to back up to Acts 2:42, because it lays the groundwork for what we read in chapter 3.

To be used powerfully by God...

I. Abide in Christ (Acts 2:42-43)

READ Acts 2:42-43. This is the climate in which the apostles and the entire church are living. They are daily pursuing their relationship with Christ. They are doing it with great joy and in a consistent, even disciplined manner. And, as a result, Christ is making His presence known among them... "awe."

This is where serving God in His power begins... living in Jesus, and letting Him live freely in you.

This sets the stage for the second point:

To be used powerfully by God...

II. Be Sensitive to God's Promptings (v. 1-3)

READ v. 1-3

God is arranging an event that only He knows about:

- **Peter and John** going to pray at the temple at one of the three *daily* times of prayer for faithful Jews. (v. 1)

And at the same time...

- **A crippled man** is being carried to one of the temple gates, "Beautiful." This is his *daily* place of begging. (v. 2)

They're all doing what they normally would do. They don't know that God has arranged something amazing for them.

God is always at work arranging His will... whether we're in our normal routines or doing something special.

The crippled man arrives at the temple gate first, and, as Peter and John approach, he asks them for money.

Peter and John are overflowing in the riches and

power of God, but, they don't have what the crippled man is asking for.

Their pockets are empty... they have no money... not one copper or silver or gold coin to place in the man's hand, so that he can buy some food to fill his empty stomach.

But... they do have what he really needs...

The apostles are poor in material things, but they are very rich in the things of God. They are:

*full of the Holy Spirit,
abounding in God's grace,
wealthy in God's forgiveness,
rich in relationships with fellow believers,
rich in spiritual gifts,
fully equipped for every good work,*

They have:

*complete and full access to God in prayer
abundant insight into God's word through the Holy Spirit,
"every spiritual blessing" in the heavenly realms because they have a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

They are:

*Beloved children of God,
Princes of the King,
Full of humility, and
Full of the power of God Almighty,*

They don't have the world's riches, but they are rich and powerful in the Lord!!

And the same is true of every child of God... all these riches are ours, all these privileges are ours!

Now, Peter is walking close with the Lord, and, so he hears the voice of God as He prompts him to exercise His power on behalf of the crippled man.

To be used powerfully by God... **II. Be Sensitive to God's Promptings**

To be used powerfully by God...

III. Trust God's Promptings and Rely on His Power (v. 4-8)

In faith, Peter and John respond to God's prompting... they share the power and riches of God with this man.

READ v. 4-8: "Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!'

5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

6 Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'"

So, in obedience to God's prompting, they speak God's word, and God releases His power:

READ v. 7-8 "Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."

By trusting God's prompting and giving to the man what God has given them, the man is healed and God is glorified.

And the same is true for us: As we trust God's promptings, He uses us to accomplish His purposes in people's lives.

Hebrews 11 is all about people trusting God by doing what He tells them to do... and the powerful things God does as a result. There are people of all kinds, bold, timid, men, women, prophets and kings and commoners, and as they respond in faith, God works His powerful purposes through all of them:

v. 4: Abel (first and finest offering)

v. 7: Noah (build what no one had ever seen or done)

v. 8: Abraham (go to a place I will show you)

v. 23: Moses' Mom and Dad (hid Moses in a little crib boat... and watched God send Pharaoh's daughter to take him up, and raise him in the palace, and become a Prince of Egypt and ultimately God's prophet.

Now, let's continue through this passage, because the story isn't over!

As important as this man's healing is, and it is important, there is something bigger that God is doing.

You see, many times in the Gospels and Acts, miracles are called "**miraculous signs.**" (see Acts 2:43) That is, the miracle is like a sign... it is pointing a certain direction, or it displays a necessary message.

In this case, the **miracle** points to Jesus. The **necessary message** for the people in the temple is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior they have been waiting for and reading about in the Scriptures for thousands of years.

To be used powerfully by God...

IV. Be Prepared to Share Your Faith (v. 9-26, 4:4)

READ v. 9-26, 4:4

God used the faith of Peter and John, and the miracle of the crippled man's healing, to get the attention of the crowd so they could hear the message of Jesus.

Notice the pattern:

1. Peter and John are daily developing their relationship with God through His word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.
2. God prompts them in the direction of His will.
3. By faith, they obey His prompting.
4. God puts His love and message on display.

ILLUSTRATION

"Waiting to board the plane, I had the Bible on my lap and was very intent upon what I was doing. I'd had a marvelous morning with the Lord. I say that because I want to tell you it is a scary thing to have the Spirit of God really working in you. You could end up doing some things you never would have done otherwise. Life in the Spirit can be dangerous for a thousand reasons not the least of which is your ego.

I tried to keep from staring but he was such a strange sight. Humped over in a wheelchair, he was skin and bones, dressed in clothes that obviously fit when he was at least twenty pounds heavier. His knees protruded from his trousers, and his shoulders looked like the coat hanger was still in his shirt. His hands looked like tangled masses of veins and bones. The strangest part of him was his hair and nails. Stringy gray hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back. His fingernails were long. Clean, but strangely out of place on an old man.

I looked down at my Bible as fast as I could, discomfort burning my face. As I tried to imagine what his story might have been, I found myself wondering if I'd just had a Howard Hughes sighting. Then, I remembered that he was dead. So this man in the airport... an impersonator maybe? Was a camera on us somewhere?

There I sat trying to concentrate on the Word to keep from being concerned about a thin slice of humanity served on a wheelchair only a few seats from me. All the while my heart was growing more and more overwhelmed with a feeling for him. Let's admit it. Curiosity is a heap more

comfortable than true concern, and suddenly I was awash with aching emotion for this bizarre-looking old man.

I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen. And it may be embarrassing. I immediately began to resist because I could feel God working on my spirit and I started arguing with God in my mind.

'Oh no, God please no.' I looked up at the ceiling as if I could stare straight through it into heaven and said, 'Don't make me witness to this man. Not right here and now. Please. I'll do anything. Put me on the same plane, but don't make me get up here and witness to this man in front of this gawking audience. Please, Lord!'

There I sat in the blue vinyl chair begging His Highness, 'Please don't make me witness to this man. Not now. I'll do it on the plane.'

Then I heard it... 'I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair.'

The words were so clear, my heart leapt into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top. Do I witness to the man or brush his hair? No brainier. I looked straight back up at the ceiling and said, 'God, as I live and breathe, I want you to know I am ready to witness to this man. I'm on this Lord. I'm Your messenger! You've never seen a woman witness to a man faster in your life. What difference does it make if his hair is a mess if he is not redeemed? I am on him. I am going to witness to this man.'

Again as clearly as I've ever heard an audible word, God seemed to write this statement across the wall of my mind. 'That is not what I said. I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to go brush his hair.' I looked up at God and quipped, 'I don't have a hairbrush. It's in my suitcase on the plane; how am I supposed to brush his hair without a hairbrush?'

God was so insistent that I almost involuntarily began to walk toward him as these thoughts came to me from God's word: 'God will fully equip us for every good thing He wants us to do.' (2 Tim 3:17) [paraphrase from NLT]

I stumbled over to the wheelchair thinking I could use one myself. I knelt down in front of the man, and asked as demurely as possible, 'Sir, may I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?'

He looked back at me and said, 'What did you say?'

'May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair? To which he responded in volume ten, "Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you're going to have to talk louder than that."

At this point, I took a deep breath and blurted out, 'SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BRUSHING YOUR HAIR?' ... at which point every eye in the place darted right at me. I was the only thing in the room looking more peculiar than old Mr. Longlocks.

Face crimson and forehead breaking out in a sweat, I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face, and say, 'If you really want to.'

Are you kidding? OF course I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then. He pressed on my heart until I could utter the words, 'Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush.'

'I have one in my bag,' he responded. I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees and unzipped the stranger's old carry-on hardly believing what I was doing. I stood up and started brushing the old man's hair. It was perfectly clean, but it was tangled and matted.

I don't do many things well, but I must admit I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair mothering two little girls. Like I'd done with either Amanda or Melissa in such a condition, I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time not to pull.

A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair. Everybody else in the room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me. I brushed and I brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out of that hair. I know

this sounds so strange but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life. I believe with all my heart, I--for that few minutes--felt a portion of the very love of God... that He had overtaken my heart for a little while like someone renting a room and making Himself at home. The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew they had to be God's.

His hair was finally as soft and smooth as an infant's. I slipped the brush back in the bag, went around the chair to face him. I got back down on my knees, put my hands on his knees, and said, 'Sir, do you know my Jesus?' He said, 'Yes, I do.'

Well, that figures, I thought. He explained, 'I've known Him since I married my bride. She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior.' He said, 'You see, the problem is, I haven't seen my bride in months. I've had open-heart surgery, and she's been too ill to come see me. I was sitting here thinking to myself, what a mess I must be for my bride.'

Only God knows how often He allows us to be part of a divine moment when we're completely unaware of the significance. This, on the other hand, was one of those rare encounters when I knew God had intervened in details only He could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it. Our time came to board, and we were not on the same plane.

I was deeply ashamed of how I'd acted earlier and would have been so proud to have accompanied him on that aircraft.

I still had a few minutes, and as I gathered my things to board, the airline hostess returned from the corridor, tears streaming down her cheeks. She said, 'That old man's sitting on the plane, sobbing. Why did you do that? What made you do that?'

I said, 'Do you know Jesus? He can be the bossiest thing!' And we got to share.

I got on my own flight, sobs choking my throat, wondering how many opportunities just like that one had I missed along the way... all because I didn't want people to think

I was strange. God didn't send me to that old man. He sent that old man to me."

CONCLUSION

Notice the same pattern we saw in the Scriptures:

1. This woman was meeting with God that morning through His word and prayer.

Do you think you can fit some personal time with God into your schedule?

2. God prompts her in the direction of His will.

Are you familiar enough with God's word that you know His voice when you hear it?

3. She trusts God's prompting and moves into action.

Do you act when God prompts you?

4. God uses her to share His love and His message.

Can you share your faith? Do you?

April 10 begins a new "Share Your Faith" class. Sign up! Write it on your communication card or call the church office.

"Father in Heaven, I'd like to spend time with You and get to know Your voice so I can respond to You day-by-day and live the exciting adventures You have for me. Thank You for speaking to me and directing me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.