

Acts 3:11-16

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The people who witnessed the healing of the lame beggar follow Peter and John. Peter confronts them on why they should be amazed. Don't they know that only God can work such a miracle?

This miracle was done by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Messiah, whom the Jewish people put to death, whom God raised back to life.

The healed man rightly praises God for his healing, but he is *clinging to Peter and John*, since they are the instruments God used to heal him. He is overjoyed at what God has done for him through these men. Peter notices that *all the people* there in the temple *ran together* in a crowd to *them*, stopping them *at the so-called portico of Solomon* (see illustration in the Maps and Charts section). They were *full of amazement*. Perhaps at this point Peter and John have prayed and have come out of the temple, and are stopped at the *portico* by all these eyewitnesses to the healing.

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people. So as the people come to gawk at the healed man, Peter uses it as an opportunity to speak, and preach to them. Peter almost always has something to say. His audience here is Jewish, so he addresses them, *Men of Israel*, and asks them, *why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?* They are *Men of Israel*, believers in the One True God, and should know where the healing came from: God. The healed man knew right away who had healed him; it wasn't through Peter's *own power or piety*, his own supernatural authority or righteousness to make a lame man *walk*. The healed man praised God the moment he was healed (Acts 3:10).

So Peter challenges the fact that these devout Jews are *amazed* and *gaze* at him and John. Jesus had spent three years healing people and casting out demons (Matthew 8:5, Mark 1:34), going to the temple on many occasions, challenging the religious leaders (Matthew 21:23-25). He also upset the lenders' tables (Matthew 21:12-13), before he was publicly tried and executed. Jesus's death on the cross was fairly recent, only a couple months prior. So Peter brings the attention of these *Men of Israel* back to Jesus. At this point they should not be *amazed* by God healing a lame man. The Son of God died and was resurrected not two months ago. Peter preached a sermon to thousands of Jews at Pentecost even more recently, perhaps not even a week before this event, about the fact that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah sent to Israel.

Peter reminds these gathered Jews of these things here in the temple courtyard, where he invokes the name of the *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*. By listing the patriarchs of Israel, men who followed God, *the God of our fathers*, Peter is connecting Jesus, and His healing power, with the power of the God of the Bible. He was their God, and is the same God who *has glorified His servant Jesus*. The word *glorified* means "make the essence of something known to observers." The audience has ample evidence to know who Jesus is, if they have a willingness to see. But Peter is direct: *Jesus is the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.*

Pontius *Pilate*, the Roman governor of Judaea, could find not fault under Roman law in Jesus, and *had decided to release* Jesus, but since the Jews were near riotous with their demands that Jesus be executed, Pilate yielded to the mob. It was the Jewish leaders who *delivered* Jesus to *Pilate*, but ultimately the crowds themselves *disowned* Jesus with their cries to have Him crucified (Luke 23:23).

It is only two people, Peter and John, speaking to this huge group. And what Peter decides to do is say, quite boldly, “What you just saw is the person you killed (Jesus) healing this lame man.” In doing this, Peter certainly understood that he was putting himself at risk, but courageously proceeded.

Peter was often bold, and every strength is also a weakness. It all depends on how the strength is applied. Peter’s boldness appears many times in the Gospels. On the Mount of Transfiguration his boldness was a weakness, because it was applied to “My Way.” Peter witnessed Jesus transfigure into glorious shining light, and Elijah and Moses appear and speak with Him. Peter’s knee-jerk reaction is, “We should build tents here in honor of the three of you.”

And God audibly speaks, and essentially says, ‘Be quiet, Peter. Now is not the time to talk. Listen to My Son! Your plans are not relevant right now. Why don’t you learn to follow My plan? You always have a plan. It’s always your plan. Learn to follow my Son’s plan’ (Luke 9:33-39). In Acts 3, we see Peter’s boldness channeled into following God’s plan. He learned.

Peter was the first to declare Jesus the Messiah. Jesus asked His twelve disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter is bold, being first to speak up: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blesses Peter for his bold answer, but humbles him in the same moment by pointing out that God revealed this to Peter (Matthew 16:13-17).

And yet moments afterwards, Jesus begins to explain to the disciples that He is going to die and be raised again and Peter (boldly) rebukes Him. Again, Peter’s strength becomes a weakness, because it is applied to “My Way.” Peter took Jesus aside (so as not to embarrass Him) and says something to the effect of, ‘You have to stop saying stuff like that, Jesus. You’re not going to die. You’re going to do what I expect you to as the Messiah.’ And Jesus rebukes him, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matthew 16:21-23). This was likely difficult for Peter to hear. But he learned. Here on the Temple Mount we see Peter fully engaged with God’s plan, rather than his own. His boldness is now a great strength.

Another example is at the moment of Jesus’s arrest. There, Peter boldly and courageously draws a sword and is getting ready to launch into an army of soldiers, because he is willing to die for Jesus. But apparently only as long as things are going according to his plan (John 18:10). And then when Jesus submits to arrest (which was not part of Peter’s plan) Peter ends up very fervently (boldly) denying Jesus three times, no longer interested in dying for Christ. But Peter repented. He learned.

Now, what once was a weakness where Peter put his plans and impulses first, becomes an amazing strength in the form of courage to follow God’s plan. Here, he is confronting a crowd of

people with the truth, fearlessly. What once was reckless self-interest is now bold service to God. All gifts are good. Peter is now directing his gifts to God's service. Peter, the knucklehead, who's always got his foot in his mouth, and always is trying to get his way, has now been transformed. He is courageously speaking the truth to people that can hurt him, kill him, just as they did to Jesus.

He goes on, *But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.* The murderer was Barabbas (Luke 23:18-19). His name means "Son of the father" ("bar" is son, and "abba" is father). When Jesus was on trial, the choice for the Jewish people as presented by Pilate was to release either a *murderer* and insurrectionist, Barabbas, named "son of the father," or the one who is actually the Son of Father God Himself. Which "son of the father" did the people choose? The *murderer*. And Peter rightly reminds them a second time that they *disowned* Jesus, who was *the Holy and Righteous One* of God—their long-awaited Messiah.

Not only had they *disowned* Jesus, they called for Him to be crucified. They called for Him to be *put to death*. But Peter isn't only shaming them for executing an innocent man. He is calling their attention to who Jesus is. The Jewish people called for the death of *the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses*. Peter calls Him the *Prince of life* because death could not hold Him, as Peter explained in his sermon at Pentecost:

"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."
(Acts 2:24)

Peter points to the *fact* that he witnessed first-hand the resurrected Christ, the *one whom God raised from the dead*. He and John saw Him. They spent forty days seeing Him, eating with Him, learning from Him, just as in the years before His death (Acts 1:3). Jesus was killed, and was alive again, because He is the *Prince of life, the Holy and Righteous One, the Son of God*.

After bringing the gathered crowd's attention to Jesus, Peter makes the connection between the lame man's healing and the power of Christ:

And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Because of Peter's *faith* in Jesus's *name*, the *man whom the people see and know*, the beggar who had sat in the temple for years, unable to walk, has been *strengthened*. Peter attributes the *perfect health* of the man to *the faith which comes through Jesus*. This healing happened in front of many witnesses, *in the presence of you all*, the Jews who saw it take place, who have formed a crowd around Peter and John.

Peter is saying, 'You saw this with your own eyes. Jesus did this, the man you killed not long ago. He was actually God. He's alive. I've seen Him. He is the Prince of life. His power healed this man because He is God and He is living.' It's a direct accusation, but he gives the people an

opportunity to respond and repent in verse 19: “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away.” Peter was forgiven. He also rejected Jesus, repented, and was restored to fellowship (John 21:15-19). He now offers the same opportunity to his fellow Jews.

The Greek word for “*witnesses*” here in verse 15, which Peter and John applied to themselves as those who witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the word “*martus*.” The English word “*martyr*” is derived from it. Peter will be arrested for this sermon (Acts 4:3). And while he will be released and live many more years teaching about Jesus, ultimately Peter will be arrested and killed, and become a martyr as we mean the word today—someone who dies physically for their faith.

John was not physically martyred, but he was still martyred in a way. John was still a witness of Christ’s and was punished for it. His martyrdom was a different kind of separation; it was exile. He ends up on the Island of Patmos, and he writes the book of Revelation. The primary exhortation of Revelation is to be a faithful witness and not fear death of any kind—separation, loss, rejection, even physical death—for it is through living this life of a faithful witness, as an “*overcomer*” that we gain the greatest blessing in life. For John, who does not speak here, but is in just as much jeopardy as Peter, his crowning ministry (in his Revelation) will be this message: Be a faithful witness and do not fear death.

In Revelation 3, Jesus talks about this idea of being a faithful witness and not fearing death. He says this, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Jesus, speaking to several churches in Revelation, says basically the same thing Peter says to the Jewish people here, “Repent and return.”

Jesus is speaking to the Laodicean Church in Revelation 3. The Laodicean Church thinks it is doing well; in fact, it’s full of wealthy believers. They think they’re fine, that they’ve got everything taken care of. And so Jesus’s message is, ‘Stop being self-oriented and self-seeking, and listen to my voice.’ It’s to the Church in Laodicea that He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” This is just like the early church did, dining and fellowshiping with one another (Revelation 3:20, Acts 2:46). Jesus desires to have the kind of fellowship that results in listening, absorbing what Jesus says, such that it becomes a part of our lives. It is in this way we can gain true riches (Revelation 3:18).

And it was out of fellowship with one another that this bold behavior in the early church was born (Hebrews 10:24). The closeness and mutual love of the early church for one another, as faithful witnesses, was a testimony that brought people to Christ (John 13:35; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). The primary point of Revelation is that every believer has an opportunity to be an overcomer by being a faithful witness, “*martus*” (Revelation 3:21). Every believer has an opportunity to be an overcomer, even those who have failed (like Peter and Paul failed).

What Peter does here in Acts 3 provides an example of being an overcomer, by being a faithful witness. Peter overcomes the threat of rejection and persecution, even death. He not only heals the man through faith in Jesus, but he then remains, and confronts his fellow Jews by speaking

the truth. This is the same truth for which Jesus was killed just a couple of months before. But Peter is courageous, and speaks the truth anyway.

Biblical Text

While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. ¹² But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. ¹⁴ But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.