

## Getting Connected to God : Acts 3: 1 - 26

I have a solemn confession to make. I realise that I have been in denial about it for some time but it is time to face facts. My confession is this:

I like listening to Radio 2. Radio 1 is just too shouty for me these days. Gone are my days of hearing top pop music its easy listening from here on in! Terry Wogan in the morning. Steve Right if I am in the car in the afternoon! I have truly entered the middle years of life!

In today's passage we have a healing and interestingly Whilst listening to radio 2 this week I caught part of an interview with a guy claiming to be a healer. He claimed a new 'frequency' had become available to humanity since the millennium and all we needed to do was tune into it. I only caught snippets. I was trying to work out where the guy was coming from. On reflection the significance of the year 2000 probably meant that he is somehow connected with the New Age movement as they believe that the year 2000 is the beginning of a new age – the age of Aquarius. There are in some quarters in society a great deal of interest in healing and I think it might be helpful to make some comments on it.

I had a Doctor friend stay recently who was telling of a case they had come across – this is a true story. A patient had been diagnosed with inoperable and terminal lung cancer. They group of Doctor's looked at the x-rays and discussed it round the desk. There

was nothing more that could be done for the woman apart from regular x-rays to monitor. Over a period of weeks the company of Doctors were perplexed to find that the cancer was shrinking and eventually disappeared. They talked about it and noted the fact that the woman had told them she was a Christian and her friends were praying for her. Do you know what a group of largely athiestic Doctor's put it down to? A Miracle. Praise God! But the subsequent questions that it raises are complicated. Why was this woman healed and not others? Well, answer to prayer can come in many ways. I had cancer 4 years ago and was healed through surgery but did know a strength to cope through many folks praying for me. Christians involved in such things today would say that healing also may come in many forms – spiritual healing where a person comes to know Jesus in a new and personal way, emotional healing – where long term inner conflicts are resolved, relational healing – where outer conflicts are resolved. And where there is no physical healing the Christian hope is that a Christian person is being called home to heaven, which is a far better place.

Open the passage read for us earlier Acts chapter 3 p. 1094

Now remember what we said last week - that when we survey the bible we see that healings come in clusters and those clusters usually accompany a new revelation of God or a new messenger from God. We see a significant number of healings

performed by the Apostles as they are God's messengers heralding the good news of Jesus.

**Acts 3:1** *One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon.*

Peter and John – probably the two with the most opposite character types. Peter the impulsive one. John the more reflective and deep type. But they are united in a new way. They are examples of the unity the gospel of Jesus brings. It has power to bring even the most diametrically opposing character types together. Why? Because both hearts are transformed and being transformed by the grace and power of Jesus Christ. The gospel should be bringing unity amongst us!

They went for prayers in the temple at 3pm. In those days there were three opportunity for Jews to gather for prayer. Early in the morning, mid afternoon and after sunset. The early Christians did not pass up an opportunity to pray so off they went.

**Acts 3:2-3** <sup>2</sup> *Now a man crippled 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.* <sup>3</sup> *When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.*

The temple in Jerusalem was set in the heart of a huge Palace built by King Herod. The Gate called Beautiful was on the way into the temple

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If you have traveled in Europe then this will not be unfamiliar to you. People begging outside places of worship.

**Acts 3:4-5** <sup>4</sup> *Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"* <sup>5</sup> *So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.*

Had he already moved on to ask the next folks for money so they had to catch his attention again?

He must have thought – at last, some money from someone. He was about to get more than he bargained for. He was about to receive healing of his body and salvation for his soul (infer from 4:14).

**Acts 3:6-10** <sup>6</sup> *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."* <sup>7</sup> *Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.* <sup>8</sup> *He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.* <sup>9</sup> *When all the people saw him walking and praising God,* <sup>10</sup> *they recognised 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.*

Did this really happen? Is it made up? Well Luke who wrote this is as we have said an accredited historian, he is himself a Doctor and surely, if God is real and the creator of the universe then this is more than possible for him. Why this man and not others? Well, there were others and remember these signs have come to commend a new messenger or message from God.

What is the message?

**Acts 3:11** <sup>11</sup> *While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.*

Was there chattering in the prayer time? Did folks follow them out? However it happened – out comes the message

**Acts 3:12-15** <sup>12</sup> *When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, 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? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.*

Peter lays before them a stark reminder of what had happened not 2 months ago. In summary - the person you thought worthy of death God thought worthy of exaltation, glory and honour. The one you thought a useless prophet and teacher was in fact the Son of God – the Holy and Righteous one, the Messiah and you traded his life for a murderer. You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead.

It is amazing that a people, the first century Jews, who really wanted God's help. Who had been promised it! Who were praying for it! Could not see God's help when it came to them. Or was it they did not like what God had to say to them? Interesting! What would we have been like? Let's think about that more in a minute.

Let's here what else Peter has to say

**Acts 3:16-20** <sup>16</sup> *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 given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. <sup>17</sup> "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus.*

Here we are getting to the nub of the message- the phrase. 'by faith in the name of Jesus' vs 16

## **By Faith in the name of Jesus**

In the name of Jesus? What? Not in Jesus himself?

It is an interesting idea. One that is not used much these days. But it is still in use:

If you have a passport and look at it you will see the following written at the front

*“Her Britannic Majesty’s Secretary of State Requests and requires in the Name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford the bearer such assistance and protection as may be necessary”*

The request is made in the name of her majesty. Why? Because the name of her majesty sums up all that her majesty is supposed to represent – the government, the army, the wealth of the nation and its people.

So to have faith in the name of Jesus means to have faith in all that he is – Infinite untameable God, the one present and active in at creation, the one who came as a man to die for our wrong doing and reconnect us with God, who rose from the dead, who

ascended to heaven, who reigns with all power and might. By faith in his name the man was made well.

That event points us to a message. That by faith in the name of Jesus – in all that he is we can be connected, reconnected to God. We will see more of this in a minute.

But for now we are to understand that Jesus has the power, the authority to make life transforming changes to those who want to know the reality of God in their lives.

Peter will now tell us how and a why.

Let’s take the why first

**Acts 3:19** *so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Is that really necessary? Sins wiped out? Forgiveness?

Tony Blair, not known for being a spiritual guru said something very interesting in 1995

*“We enjoy a thousand material advantages over any previous generation, and yet we have a depth of insecurity and spiritual doubt they never knew”*

Tony Blair points to the symptom but it is surely God, the expert on spiritual matters who knows the root of the issue.

The truth of the matter is that we have become embroiled to one degree or another in the way and thinking of this world which is selfish, self oriented, greedy and increasingly unscrupulous. Search your heart and consider how true that is. It is true for me – we desire wealth and are not always prepared to consider at whose expense we get it. We want cheap goods but do not think about the child filled sweat shops who produce them. We want to know God but often on our terms not on his. This is not a pleasant thing is it? Nobody likes to be told they may be wrong! It is not that everything we do is wrong but that through the lives we live we have cut ourselves off from God as Mr Blair indicated.

This tray cover from Burger King in a kind of extreme way illustrates the point:

*“You have the right to have what you want, exactly when you want it. Because on the menu of life, you are “Today’s Special”. And tomorrow’s. And the day after that. And...well, you get the drift. Yes, that right. We may be the King, but you my friend, are the almighty ruler.”*

Now I assume it is tongue in cheek but there is a degree of truth in all humour.

The flip side of this is something that I think we would all like to know.

*Vs 19 times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

By that Peter means spiritual re-energising, a soul deep refreshment. That replaces insecurity and spiritual doubt.

A philosopher of old once said

*“Lord you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you”*

Faith in the name of Jesus brings rest/refreshing to our souls. How do I know its true? I have experienced it. As I speak with many in this congregation I hear them describing the time they first came to experience it. Some were sitting a sermon, boom, it came upon them and their lives were changed. Others finding they weren’t sure what had happened but they couldn’t help but want to find out more about Jesus and his word and faith in him. Others a fresh awakening in their souls and hunger to receive more.

This is no quick fix from God and so it requires a realistic assessment of our spiritual state. Which is that we are off-track, we are sinners and we need forgiveness and the deep cleansing and refreshing of our souls!

What do you make of that? It isn’t pretty but it seems realistic doesn’t it?

So what is to be done?

Well according to Peter the thing to do is,

## **By repenting and turning to God**

*Vs 19 Repent and turn to God*

Do I sound like one of those old fire and brimstone preachers? The thing about Christianity is the packaging may change but the message remains the same! Repent is the first recorded words of Jesus – Mark 1:16!

Repentance is simply turning away from one course of action and turning to God.

So in order to receive forgiveness and soul refreshing we need to enter by the door God has appointed. I have heard others rattle at other doors – the ‘I live a good life so God must accept me’ door, the ‘my brother is a minister and so my family has a lot of religion in it’ door, the ‘I go to church’ door, the ‘I believe in God’ door. Anything but the ‘Repentance’ door!

You know the people he was addressing were very religious, we know that because they were at the temple but religiousity and such like is not what God is looking for. According to Jesus and Peter you or I cannot receive what he is offering by any other means than turning away for a kind of self reliance and saying to God I want to do it my way but and turning to him through faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and all he has and can do for you, for us.

Repentance is a genuine sorrow for not living God’s way and a wholehearted turning and desire to follow his way from now on. Putting faith, however small, in the name of Jesus who has power from heaven to change.

Charles Wesley wrote of his experience of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus

*“Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray  
I woke the dungeon filled with light  
My chains fell off, my heart was free.  
I rose went forth and followed thee”*

*Reconnected to God through faith and repentance.*