

PRICELESS GIFTS FROM PENNILESS MEN

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give to thee." Acts 3:6.

This text has a most interesting setting. The scene is laid in Jerusalem, which has long been the Mecca for penniless men. History records their presence many years before Christ came. The gospels are full of the stories of such men, and they are still to be found there in great numbers. In the light of this story, I should like to mention four things:—

I. The Companions.

These companions are two of the apostles—Peter and John. These two men were linked together on many occasions. They were probably about the same age. They had been friends since their youth. They were partners in sin before they were saved. They were partners in the fishing business and fished in the Sea of Galilee. They were quite different, and for that reason it is interesting to find them together. Opposites often well agree. Peter was impulsive, bold, energetic, and daring; while John was meditative, timid, loving, and trustful. Peter was practical; John was mystical. Each had something which the other lacked, so they could help each other, and they did so. If we will cultivate an interest in people who are different from ourselves, we will be enriched thereby.

Peter and John had delightful fellowship with each other. On many occasions their names were linked in fellowship and in service. Both of them were poor, but there is nothing unusual about that, because preachers have economic troubles just as others do. The fact that they were poor did not keep them from going to the house of the Lord for the purpose of worshipping Him. They went to church even though they were poor. The fact that they did not have any money did not keep them from being faithful to the Lord, and to their obligations. Some people have the mistaken idea that people have to be well dressed before they will be welcome at church. The fact that Peter and John were poor did not even keep them away from prayer meeting. The prayer meeting hour never comes in the calendar of some people. In fact, it is not found in the calendar of most church members. But Peter and John went to prayer meeting. They were not too busy to attend this important service. Neither did the fact that they were poor keep them from being happy, and from rendering valuable services. Some have the false idea that there is no happiness apart from the things that money can buy. Some of the happiest people in the world are poor people, and some of the most unhappy people are those who possess great wealth. Fine houses and costly clothing do not make happy people. Happiness springs out of a contented spirit rather than out of a bulging purse. Happiness is born out of deeds done rather than out of benefactions received.

II. The Cripple.

As the apostles approached the gate of the temple called Beautiful, they observed a beggar sitting near the entrance. He had been lame from his birth, approximately forty years before. The cripple was placed at the most frequented gate of the temple in order that he might appeal to the passing worshippers for charity. Although he was entirely dependent upon others, he was quite shrewd. He understood thoroughly the philosophy of benevolence. He did not have his family or his friends to carry him to the gate of the temple merely because the multitudes

passed to and fro. More people might have passed other places. But he had them to place him at the gate of the temple because he knew that the best people in Jerusalem went into the temple to worship. It is the cream of society that frequents places of worship. This cripple knew that people who worshipped God are in a better mood for considering the poor and supplying their wants than those who are in the whirl of business. Piety is the fountain of philanthropy. Charitable institutions are largely dependent upon those who worship God.

III. The Cure.

As Peter and John approached the man who was a cripple, he did not know their material poverty nor their spiritual wealth. He was concerned only about the pittance which he hoped to receive from them. When he asked them for a contribution, the companions paused and fastened their eyes upon him. Then Peter said, "Look on us." There was sympathy in his tone, and at the same time there was something strangely commanding about what he said. As the cripple looked at them expecting to receive something from them, Peter continued, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." And suiting the deed to the word. Peter grasped his right hand and gave him a lift. Suddenly struck through with hope, the man responded, and marvel of marvels, he found that his ankles could support him and that his feet could function perfectly.

Peter did not give him money, because he did not have any. He did not give the cripple a position, because he did not have any at his disposal. He did not give him what he had on the day before, nor what he expected to have on the next day, but he gave him that which he had at the moment. "What I have I give." He could do nothing bigger nor better than that. In this expression there are two essential phases of genuine Christian living. "I have" speaks of possession. "I give" speaks of communication. One is the experience and the other is the expression of that experience. And the two are inseparable.

What did Peter give this cripple?

1. He gave him health.
That is better than money. Who can put a price on it?
2. He gave him joy.
He had probably never seen a happy day in his life.
What floodgates were opened for him that day!
3. He gave him liberty.
He had been a prisoner all his life; now he had been set free,
and how sweet that freedom was.
4. He gave him sympathy.
How much this means to some men, and how easy it is to give. It puts a new light in the eye, a quickness in the step, and courage in the heart. And even the poorest can give that.
5. He gave him hope.
There was little of high expectation in this beggar's heart before he met Peter. He expected to remain a beggar to the end of the chapter. Peter kindled in his heart the expectation of the dawn of a better tomorrow. It is a great privilege to be a hope bringer.

6. He gave him faith.
He gave him faith in man. This beggar came somehow to believe in Peter. He was brought also to a new faith in himself. He began to believe that he might be somebody and do something in the world. He was led to a new and uplifting faith in Christ.
7. He gave him love.
Scores of people had placed money in his hands, but they had scorned him while they helped him. Peter gave him the handclasp of a brother.

Our text does not suggest that what Peter had to give was inferior to silver and gold, but rather the opposite. It accentuates the superiority of what he had above silver and gold. He had healing power in Christ's name that no money could buy and no earthly physician could give. Silver and gold can do many things such as, purchase many necessities, supply many of our wants, help to make us comfortable, help to educate our children, be used to relieve distress, to cheer the discouraged and to help the struggling, and serve as a means of advancing the cause of Christ in the world. At the same time we must never forget that money cannot buy a good conscience, bring contentment, purchase health, buy love, or grace, or a home in heaven. Peter said, in substance, I cannot give you silver and gold for I do not have either. But, I do have Christ, and I am ready and eager to share Him with you. The point here is that all receivers of God's grace are to be transmitters of these gifts to others. Our lives are to be rivers and not reservoirs, channels and not cisterns.

IV. The Consequences.

His cure was unexpected, instantaneous, thorough and permanent.

1. He was delirious with joy.
 - (1) He leaped up.
 - (2) He stood.
 - (3) He walked--this was a new experience to him.
 - (4) He went into the temple with the apostles.
 - (5) He praised God.
2. The crowd was dumb with wonder.
Seeing him, knowing him, they reasoned that the change could not have been effected except by Divine power.
3. He was a different man.
 - (1) He received a new spirit.
 - (2) He felt the glow of a new courage.
 - (3) He heard the call of a new ideal.
 - (4) He experienced the joy of a new hope. Able to work for himself.
 - (5) He was touched by the new sympathy.
He had probably never known a real friend. Peter stopped and spoke to him, and extended the hand of friendship. He was thrilled by it.
 - (6) He felt the power of a new inspiration.
They gave him a new inspiration to live. Whoever inspires another for a nobler life has given him a blessing of inestimable worth. The business man who found Russell H. Conwell as a dirty lad who had slept in an ash barrel, carried him to his home, had him bathe, clothed him in a new suit, and took him

to Sunday School with him that Sunday morning, made an investment that will bear dividends until the end of time. The warm breakfast, the new suit, the comfortable room, were as nothing compared to the inspiration that came into the heart of a waif of the street. It is no wonder that he wrote "Acres of Diamonds," which gave the story of his life.

And the glorious thing is that these priceless gifts--the throb of a new courage, the call of a new ideal, the joy of a new hope, the touch of a new sympathy, and the power of a new inspiration may come from penniless men.