

AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

Acts 3:1-11

Jerusalem has long been the Mecca for penniless men. History records their presence there many years before Christ was born. The gospels are full of the stories of such men, and they are still to be found there in great numbers. They crouch down beside the rock walls, with their dirty hands extended, and mutter, "Bakshish! Bakshish!", which means "Give me something!"

I. The Companions.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer." This is not the first nor the last time these two were associated. They were probably about the same age, and likely had been friends from their youth upward. They were companions in sin before they were saved. They were partners in the fishing business. It seems that something cemented them together, and that they were inseparable friends. They were the two special ambassadors who went to prepare the room for the Passover Supper. They were the two who ran together to the empty tomb. And on many occasions their names were linked in fellowship and in service. So, here they go together to the place of prayer.

Peter and John were so different that it is interesting to find them together. There is nothing like Pentecostal power to harmonize opposite temperaments. They were the very opposite of each other in disposition. Peter was impulsive, bold, energetic, and daring. John was meditative, timid, loving, and dependable. Peter was practical, and John was mystical. Peter was "the speaker of the house," as it were, and John was a "favorite with the Master." They made a good team. Each had something the other lacked, so they were mutually helpful. The closest intimacies are often formed by those who agree in their aims, but differ widely in their temperament and mental habits. These companions, who were so different, teach us the importance of cultivating an interest in people who are different from us, and thereby enrich our own lives.

Peter and John enjoyed the communion of saints with each other. Like all of those who have been the greatest blessing to mankind through the ages, they loved God and frequented His temple. The more Christianity a man has, the more he will love God and delight in the hour of prayer in the Lord's house. We find these two men wending their way to the temple to pray, even though they were poor. If our faithfulness does not go beyond our prosperity, then we need a stronger grip on God and the better and nobler things of life. Poverty certainly did not prevent Peter and John from being happy. What a false notion that there is no happiness apart from the things that money can buy! Some of the happiest people are poor; and some of the most unhappy ones are those who possess fortunes. Fine houses, expensive clothing, and high-priced cars do not make happy people. Happiness springs out of a contented spirit rather than from a bulging purse. Happiness is born out of deeds done rather than out of benefactions received.

II. The Cripple.

This gate was superior in costliness and splendor to the other eight entrances to the temple. Composed of Corinthian brass, which was a very resplendent metal, it towered to a height of nearly fifty feet, and its breadth was about twenty feet. It was adorned with perfect skill. It represented all that art could do. It was the master-

piece of the workmanship of man. When the sun shone on it the people would cry "Beautiful" until at last the gate got that as its name. Yet there, beside it was a helpless beggar. What a contrast! Infinite beauty and colossal wealth in stone and metal, and then ugliness and privation in life!

Only a few feet from this wonderful gate was a lame, helpless, and needy man. He was a cripple, not as the result of an accident, nor as the result of sin in his own life, but from his birth. His birth had brought great joy to his parents, that unusual joy of looking upon a child as the potential Messiah. The weeks and months went by, but when the time came for him to walk, he was not able to do so. Physicians, soothsayers, and others were consulted, and various remedies were tried, but all in vain. His lameness was due to a weakness in or a malformation of the ankle bones. Being utterly helpless, he had to be carried by others.

Poverty was added to his helplessness. Unable to work, he had become a professional beggar. He was then past forty years of age. Daily, members of his family or kind neighbors carried him to the gate of the temple where he could beg. There were several reasons why the gate of the temple was selected as a propitious place for begging. Crowds of people were coming and going through it at least three times a day. This cripple was by no means a fool. He understood the philosophy of benevolence. He knew that the best people in Jerusalem went into the temple to worship. The kindest and most sympathetic people in the world are praying people. It is the people who frequent the temple who are the most thoughtful of the poor. Christianity and compassion have always gone hand in hand. Nine tenths of all the money raised for benevolent purposes, and for the support of our charitable institutions, comes from the pockets of those who go "up to the temple at the hour of prayer." This poor and afflicted man was shrewd enough to know where to go for alms. He was not down in the market among the traders because he knew where peoples' hearts were softest. He knew that it is the cream of society that frequents places of worship. Moreover, men in going and coming from church are in a better mood for considering the poor and supplying their needs than in the tumultuous whirl of business. The man who loves God most is the man who will love his fellowmen the most.

This cripple had to be carried to the gate of the temple every morning, and carried back home every evening. The very sight of him irritated many who passed by. Habitual mendicants, with their doleful looks and whining appeals, are not attractive folk. He needed money, but there were other things which he needed worse than he did that. He needed health, which is a priceless gift. The value of money pales into insignificance in comparison with health. All this poor fellow wanted was a little money. He had no hope of ever being any better than he was. There we see him, holding out his hand, beseeching the more fortunate passersby to contribute to his support.

It is worth observing that every morning he got a friendly lift. You see his relatives and friends were doing far more than they ever thought. We always do more than we realize, when we are kind. Did you ever give anyone a hand towards a Gate Beautiful? Did you ever bring a lonely person to your beautiful home or to your beautiful church? It seems a small and simple thing to do, yet who can tell what the results will be?

Looking beneath the surface, Peter saw that it was not just money that he needed. He knew what some of us need to learn, namely, that the problems of distressed humanity cannot be solved by monetary gifts.

Money can do many things for us. It can be used to provide a house in which to live, to make our homes comfortable, to purchase many of the necessities of life, to educate our children, to relieve distress, to cheer the discouraged, to help the

struggling, and to advance the cause of Christ. However, there are many things which money cannot do. Money cannot buy love. The love of a mother, the fidelity of a father, the affection of a sister, the sympathy of a brother, or the trust of a friend cannot be bought with money. Neither can money bring contentment, buy a good conscience, purchase health, obtain grace, or secure a home in heaven. Money is a valuable possession, but it is not the greatest one. Many have given something better than money. Some of you had godly fathers and mothers, yet you never think of them in terms of money. The imprint of their characters, the influence of their prayers, and the memory of their daily lives are an inheritance that fadeth not away. The influence of their examples is an ever-present reality and power, far more valuable than money.

III. The Cure.

This incident reminds us that our choicest opportunities come unsought. Peter and John were going to the house of worship that afternoon. Had they neglected to go, they would have lost much more than an hour's worship. They would have lost the glorious opportunity of finding what an ascended Lord could do. The fact that they did not have any money did not keep them from going to church services. Neither did it keep them from being happy.

As the companions approached the alluring threshold of the temple, the poor cripple thrust forth his hand, and with a professional wail asked alms of them. They might have been so busily engaged in talking that they would have passed him by. At least that would have been the convenient thing to have done. But, they did not ignore him. Instead, they turned a piercing gaze upon the man. It seemed as if the very fire of God, the fire of hope, and the fire of divine love flashed through their eyes. Oh for the grace to look upon people in such a way as to arouse in them the desire for the better and nobler things of life!

When their footsteps halted, Peter and John fastened their eyes upon him. Immediately his interest was awakened, and his hopes and expectations were aroused. Peter, speaking for both of them, in a commanding voice said, "Look on us." The challenge, "Look on us," suggests uprightness of life. It shows that they did not have anything to hide. Those who live in that way always made a real contribution to society.

Expecting to receive a small gift from them, the cripple eagerly turned towards them. The interest of these men in him was vastly different from anything the poor fellow had known before. Probably most of those who had tossed him a coin were not concerned very much about him, but were thinking of the merit in God's sight, which, according to Pharisaic doctrine, such a deed stored up for one. So, the beggar was startled to find himself an object of real interest to others. It is so easy to become accustomed to conditions until they fail to interest us or to move us.

This beggar asked for money. And that is not surprising. A society built, as society hitherto has been built, on the money standard has no right to expect anything else of its beggars. But, evidently Peter and John were living by a different standard. They did not have any money to give him, yet they stopped and considered him, and did something for him.

To the command, "Look on us," the cripple responded at once, expecting to receive something worthwhile. His very look betrayed his thoughts. His heart must have sunk within him when he heard the disappointing words. "Silver and gold have I none." But what I have give I thee," his hopes began to rise again.

With quickened interest, he wonders what Peter is going to give him. Then, Peter added, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Stooping down, Peter seized his outstretched hand and lifted him to his feet. Immediately the man felt the thrill of life and power in his feet and ankle bones. Omnipotence had met impotence and a miracle had taken place. It was the power of Christ that wrought the healing through Peter. Full of the spirit and power of Christ, he was able to help the helpless. In this connection, let us ever remember that we cannot lift others above our own level. In the grammar of Christianity, "To be comes before to do."

Christ gives us more than we expect. There is an overflow in all His gifts. In His dealings there is great abundance. This man expected alms, but he got health and strength. He begged for a coin, but he got a cure. Yes, Christ will do more for us than we expect. Christ had for him that which went far beyond his expectation, not a temporary alleviation, but a complete healing. Founded upon the unspeakable gift of God's love, Christianity has always been a religion of giving. It is missed altogether by those who try to make of it a religion of seeking and of keeping.

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" was a bold command to make, but sufficient power was available to make obedience possible. Those apostles lived and acted in the power of the name of Christ. Do we try to do that? Remember that there are some things you cannot do in the name of Christ. You cannot take advantage of another, or abuse another, or hate another in the name of Christ.

Even though we may lack money, we can contribute to the wealth of life by being kind, thoughtful, and sacrificial. Love and helpfulness are the brightest coins in the mint of life. People frequently need the added strength of our support to help them to face life's duties and demands with fresh hope and renewed courage.

This cure was unexpected, instantaneous, real, complete, and permanent.

IV. The Consequences.

1. The healed man was hilarious with joy. His helplessness had been removed completely. He stood, and walked, and leaped, and praised God. He simply had to use his new-found powers and give vent to his ecstasy of delight. With gratitude in his heart he entered the temple and worshipped.
2. The people were dumb with wonder. They were struck with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. They reasoned that the mighty miracle which had taken place could have been effected only by a divine cause. They were glad for him.

But why was the healed man so happy and grateful? It was because of what he had received. What were some of the things which he had received?

- (1) He had received sympathy.

They stopped and spoke to him. The hand of friendship was extended to him. It did not cost them any money to render this service, but it did cost them consecration, and personal devotion to the cause of right. Oh, how much real sympathy means to people, and how easy it is to give it! It puts a new light in the eye, a quickness in the step, and courage in the heart. And even the poorest can give sympathy!

- (2) He had received love.

Scores of people had put money in his hands, but they had scorned him while

- they helped him. Peter gave him the handclasp of a brother who loved him.
- (3) He had received health.
That is far better than money. Who can put a price on health?
 - (4) He had received liberty.
He had been as a prisoner all his life, but at last he had been set free. How sweet that freedom was!
 - (5) He had received joy.
What floodgates of real joy were opened for him that day!
 - (6) He had received hope.
Peter kindled in his heart the expectation of the dawn of a better tomorrow. It is a great privilege to be a bringer of hope.
 - (7) He had received inspiration.
His load had been lifted, and life had new meaning for him. He had a new inspiration to live. Whoever inspires another to live a nobler and better life has given him a blessing of inestimable worth. That 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, and the comfortable room were as nothing compared to the inspiration that came into the heart of that waif of the street. It is no wonder that he wrote "Acres of Diamonds," which told the story of his life.

And these priceless gifts, such as, the touch of a new sympathy, the call of a new ideal, the joy of a new hope, the throb of a new courage, and the power of a new inspiration may come from any and all of us who know and love the Lord.