

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Acts 3:1-11

This interesting story describes an incident which took place just a little while after the Lord Jesus lived here on this earth. Even though this incident took place many years ago, we ought not to dismiss it because of that. It has something to say to us.

Peter and John, two sturdy, healthy, peace-filled, faith-filled and dedicated apostles of Christ, were going up to the temple in Jerusalem to attend a prayer service. Like all of those who have been the greatest blessing to mankind through the ages, Peter and John loved the Lord and frequented the place of prayer and worship with regularity.

These men had delightful fellowship with each other. On many occasions their names were linked in fellowship and in service. Both of them were poor, but that did not keep them from going to the house of the Lord for the purpose of worshiping Him. The fact that they did not have any money did not keep them from being faithful and regular in their church attendance. 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, and some of the most unhappy ones possess fortunes. Fine houses, expensive clothing, and high-priced cars do not make people happy. Happiness springs out of a contented spirit rather than from a large bank account. Happiness is not born out of benefactions received, but out of deeds done.

The gate by which Peter and John approached the temple in Jerusalem was composed of Corinthian brass and was nearly fifty feet in height and twenty feet in width. It was adorned with perfect skill and it represented all that art could do. It was the masterpiece of the workmanship of man. When the sun shone upon it the people would cry "beautiful", until at last the gate got that as its name. Yet there beside it sat a helpless beggar. What a contrast! Infinite beauty and colossal wealth in stone and metal, and beside it was ugliness, poverty and privation in life.

As Peter and John were about to enter this expensive gate of such tremendous beauty, they observed a helpless cripple within a few feet of the entrance. The condition of this man was not due to an accident or to any sin in his life. He had been helpless from his birth, perhaps due to a malformation or a weakness in his ankle bones. Approximately forty years of age, this man was not only poor, but helpless also. Unable to work, he had become a professional beggar. Daily, relatives or kind friends carried him to the place which was so propitious for begging, inasmuch as the crowds entered this gate to worship at least three times daily.

Understanding the philosophy of benevolence, the cripple knew that the most kind, sympathetic and thoughtful people pray and worship regularly in the Lord's house. So, he knew where to go for alms. Those who love God most dearly are the ones who do the most for their fellow man. Never expecting to walk a step, and wanting only a little money, the helpless cripple daily sat there by the gate of the temple and held out his hand, beseeching the more fortunate passersby to contribute to his support. Christianity and compassion go hand in hand.

When this man thrust forth his hand and with the wail of a professional mendicant asked alms of them, Peter and John stopped suddenly and turned a piercing gaze upon him. As the fire of Christian love flashed through their eyes, his interest was awakened and his hopes aroused. Looking beneath the surface, they saw it was not just

money that the man needed. They 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 people. It can be used to provide a house in which to live, to make a home comfortable, to purchase many of the necessities of life, to educate children, to relieve distress, to cheer the discouraged, to help the struggling and to advance the cause of Christ. However, there are many things that 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 buy a good conscience, bring contentment, purchase health, obtain grace, or secure a home in heaven. Money is a valuable possession, but it is not the greatest by any means.

Speaking for both of them in a commanding voice, Peter said, "Look on us!" Expecting to receive something worthwhile, the cripple responded at once to the command, and his very look revealed his thoughts.

When the afflicted man turned his face in the direction commanded, eagerly expecting to receive a gift, his heart must have sunk within him at the disappointing words, "Silver and gold have I none." That is all the man wanted, just a little handout. He was probably ready to pass up Peter and John and look to the next fellow coming along and extend his hand to him. However, when Peter continued with a statement, "But such as I have give I thee," the man's hopes began to rise again. Wondering what Peter was going to give him, he listened with quickened interest as the Apostle added "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Stooping down, Peter grasped the out-stretched hand of the man and lifted him to his feet, whereupon he felt a thrill of power in his feet and ankles. This cure which Christ wrought through His servant was instantaneous, complete and permanent. The man got so much more than he thought possible, or even hoped. He was healed not only in body but in soul as well.

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 giving. "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.

Today people expect so little. They turn away from the church because they think it does not have what they want. But, it could give them much more that they don't expect. I cannot tell you that the church doesn't have any silver and gold today. Perhaps that is just one of its real troubles. In each age when churches grow wealthy they have been the least able to give what God wants them to give to people. When you have a dollar or two to spend it is easy to give a handout. Many Christian people have fallen into this easy trap of giving the dollars they can spare without any great inconvenience to themselves and saying as it were to their church, "Now you give the poor beggars in some far away place a handout for me." What I want you to see is that the real thing, the best thing and the most important thing that the church has to give really doesn't have anything to do with money. It is something much more important and valuable.

I guess in our age when so much in life is geared to and dependent upon our monetary systems, that it is natural for us to get into the habit of thinking that everything depends on money. If only we could get a little or a lot more of it, we could buy everything we want for ourselves. But that really isn't true. The best things in life

are free. You can't buy them, no matter how much money you have. For instance: life itself. How many minutes more of life can the richest man, who is about to die, buy for himself with all his money? What about health? You can go to a doctor when you are sick, or to a hospital. Thank God such aids exist when we become ill! And they do much to make life better for us, but money cannot buy health. Some folks who do not have any money at all have better health perhaps than many who can afford the best hospital and the most capable doctors.

The best things in life are free. They are gifts of God. And God gives freely without money and without price. The greatest and best things that a church has to give are free, too.

Seemingly, the beggar didn't give a thought to anything except a handout. If Peter and John had started a discussion with him about the fact that he was a beggar, and a cripple, I don't suppose he would have listened very long. Probably he would have said, "Now don't talk rubbish to me. This is the way I was born. Ask any of the people around here; they know me. I have always been like this. No one can change that. Come along! Hand over or move on and let the next man give me what you haven't got."

If you were to begin a discussion with many people about their real condition, in the sight of God, and talk to them about their sins and how they have crippled them spiritually, you would likely get yourself involved in an argument which you couldn't win because, like the beggar, they know nothing of any life except that into which they have been born. With God there is a different way of life! It is found in Jesus Christ, and is lived out in the church and among the people of God.

Fully aware that he had been healed the man became hilarious with joy. He was so grateful and happy that he had been the recipient of sympathy, love, health, liberty, hope and inspiration. He was a new man and life had a new meaning for him. In the exuberance of his new strength, and with genuine gratitude therefore in his heart, he entered the temple and there praised and worshiped God Who had wrought this great miracle on him.

The people were struck with wonder and amazement at what had happened to the beggar. Curious to learn more about his cure and to discover by what means the apostles had wrought this miracle, a great crowd assembled immediately. Knowing that it had been accomplished by divine power, and anxious for God to have all the glory for what had been done, Peter seized the opportunity to affirm that God had been the author of this remarkable miracle, of which the apostles had been the instruments only, and that simply because of their faith in Christ. Peter and John were simply the agents through whom the man was healed.

Disavowing all personal merit in connection with the miracle Peter gave the Lord all the credit for it, which was the proper thing for him to do. As twentieth century Christians we would do well to emulate his example with reference to our achievements, for He is the One Who enables us to accomplish what we do.