

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Serving in the Spirit

### Acts 3:1-11

**Intro:** At the end of **ch2**, Luke gives us a description of the early church in its infancy but it's only a thumbnail sketch. Luke told us in **2:43** that many wonders and signs were done through the apostles and that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (**47b**). As we move into **ch3**, Luke now begins to elaborate on these 2 areas in greater detail. **Ch3** is an exciting chapter because it records the first miracle performed by the apostles in the new church age. Of course, this is just one example of the many but it's a good example of what was mentioned in **2:43**. This particular miracle is actually a great example because it provides Luke an excuse to include yet another sermon by Peter as well as an explanation as to why these early Christians began to be persecuted, which is what this wonderful story eventually leads to.

**1** – temple – At first, it may strike us odd that Peter and John, commissioned apostles of the newly established Christian church, would be going up to the temple, the icon of Judaism, to pray. It seems like they should have found some other place to pray, someplace that would have provided evidence of a distinction between their belief system and that of the Jewish religion. What we need to consider again is the purpose of the Book of Acts – it's a transitional book. It takes us from the Gospels, where we see Jesus walking about preaching and ministering, to the Epistles, which are instructions from the apostles that teach us how we are to go about preaching and ministering to others.

At the beginning of Acts, Jesus is still present with the disciples. The People we meet in the early chapters knew Him or at least knew about Him. Some of them traveled with Him during the days of His ministry; most of them witnessed His resurrection. As we move through the Book, we meet people who didn't have those experiences. Paul didn't know Jesus during the days of His ministry. There are people like Timothy, Titus, Aquila and Priscilla and Apollos, who had never seen Jesus. The flow of Acts takes us from the early days in Jerusalem when Jesus was present all the way to Rome, many years after His ascension.

Acts is transitional in another way that deals with the verse at hand. Keep in mind that Acts 1-10 describes a gradual transition of the Gospel being presented to Israel and then to the Gentiles, of a “Jewish Christianity” to the 1 Body made up of both Jews and Gentiles. It took several years before many of the Jewish believers really understood the place of the Gentiles in God’s plan and this understanding did not come without some conflicts. In fact, the Jewish faith was so entrenched in these early believers that God had to step in and provide Peter with a divine vision just to bring him to the point of considering bringing the gospel to a “godly” Gentile.

Luke has already informed us that these early believers were accustomed to having their prayer meetings and formal worship services within the temple compound. Being Jews, they were still attached to the temple and the traditional hour of prayer. It is significant that Luke never mentions that any of the Christians ever went up to the temple for the hour of sacrifice. They knew that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, the Lamb that all the other lambs pointed to and that His sacrifice on the cross was the only sacrifice necessary for sin. By His death, He paid the price for sin so no other sacrifice was necessary or acceptable to God. Eventually, there would be a break from formal Judaism, but that break had not yet come.

**2-5-** Luke introduces us to an individual who was born with a physical defect in his feet and ankles that rendered him completely lame. He’s unnamed by Luke, reference only as “a certain man lame.” I think it would be unhelpful for me to go through this sermon referring to this person as the lame man because that word has a different connotation in our society today. I’ve never really had trouble walking but yet I’m constantly being told, “You’re so lame!” So in order to avoid confusion as to what this man’s problem really is, I think I should give him a name that most everyone will understand. Let’s call him – Lt. Dan! A pop-culture icon that adequately describes this unfortunate individual.

I say he was unfortunate because he was unable to walk and he had been that way his entire life. But, he did have friends and his friends helped him out by carrying him to the temple so he could sit by one of the gates and beg for money. Let’s consider what that meant: Lt. Dan simply wanted to be supported in his unfortunate condition. Of course, he rightly felt that he had no other option than to be supported in his condition; it was a lot better to be supported than to starve to death. But, even though he may never have

considered an alternate condition possible, God had something better in mind for him. Jesus wanted to completely change his condition.

Sometimes, there is humor to be found in the difference between what the Bible says and what children think it says. The story is told of a conversation between a father and his young son as they were studying this passage. The boy looked up with a puzzled look on his face and asked, “Dad, why was he asking for alms when he needed legs?” While that’s a funny line, there’s also a lot of truth hidden in there. Money is what Lt. Dan wanted but money wasn’t what he needed most. What he needed was salvation for his soul and healing for his body and money could provide neither of those things. People say money makes the world go round but it’s completely powerless to provide those things that the world needs the most.

I’m sure Lt. Dan had sat by that gate since day break trying to get the attention of anyone who might happen to pass by. That’s what beggars and panhandlers do – they position themselves in a high traffic area and attempt to get peoples attention while people in traffic do their best to try to ignore them. I’m sure Lt. Dan had plenty of experience with that so it must have surprised him just a bit when Peter commanded him to “Look at us” (4b). So, he was correct in expecting to receive something from the apostles but he was about to receive something much more valuable than a paltry monetary contribution that he would have been completely satisfied with.

One of the problems we experience with evangelism in our culture is that very few people every come to the place where they really expect something from God. In fact, very few come to the place where they realize they actually need something from God. Oh, they don’t have any trouble praying for the mundane things in life: “God, let me pass this test (that I didn’t study for).” “Lord, don’t let that Trooper be coming after me!” They’re holding their hands out for the smallest contribution of divine help while God is literally standing there poised to pour out upon them spiritual blessings of unimaginable value and assistance. How often have our low expectations of God robbed us of greater blessings? Do we expect the right things from God or are we too eager to settle for less than He wants to give?

**6-10-** Imagine Lt. Dan’s disappointment when the 1<sup>st</sup> words out of Peter’s mouth was, “I don’t have any money.” Talk about a let down! I’m surprised he didn’t give Peter the business for getting his hopes up. Sure, Peter didn’t give him much of a chance to argue with him but it had to be a shock none

the less. Of course, let's consider Peter's situation; he's a preacher of the Gospel and he's broke? How can that be? Sure, he's only been a preacher for about a week but shouldn't he be riding round in a Mercedes chariot with a gold Rolex sundial on his wrist, wearing an Italian suit? Isn't that the measure of a successful preacher? Isn't that what the people expect of their ministers today?

It's been said that 100 yrs ago, it was normal for the Pastor's wife to be large and the sanctuary hot but today, sadly, the opposite is expected. We can all agree that a lot has changed in the church since the days of Peter and John, some for the better but some for the worst. Though it's not impossible, it is difficult to find a minister that can say, "Silver and gold I do not have." They're about as hard to find as one who can say with authority, "rise up and walk."

Now there is another aspect of this that needs to be considered. Because they have a solid financial footing, there is a large section of the church today that believes it's the churches responsibility to use those finances to make the world a better place. I disagree with this mentality because it, at best, misrepresents the church's true responsibility and at worst, ignores it. Jesus told the disciples to go into all the world, preach the gospel and make disciples. That's what we're supposed to do. It's not the Church's business to make the present condition of this world more bearable. Our job is to release on earth the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ. If that can be accomplished in the process of meeting physical needs; all the better! But, a social gospel that doesn't include the Gospel of Jesus Christ is really no gospel at all. It may provide some wants and desires but it fails to meet any real needs.

Now, Peter didn't leave Lt. Dan hanging. He didn't have any money but that didn't mean he was broke. Peter was short on cash but he did just so happen to have the authority from Jesus to heal the sick ([Lk 9:1-6](#)). Peter knew what it was like to have God use him to heal others because Jesus had already trained him in this. He was able to give Lt. Dan power in the name of Jesus because that very power was already operating in his own life. A lot of people would love to have the ability to say, "rise up and walk" but they want that ability without ever having received the power of Jesus to transform their life. They want the power to perform but the power of Jesus is only given to transform.

This wasn't something Peter did on a whim or as a promotional event to draw a crowd. Peter did this under the specific prompting of the Holy Spirit. God gave Peter the supernatural ability to trust Him for something completely out of the ordinary. But what exactly did Peter do? Where did the power to heal actually come from? As we have seen, it wasn't that Peter had been endowed with some mystical power to heal; it was simply because he had been authorized by Jesus Christ to do so. That's why Peter says, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..." It's because the power to heal didn't come from Peter, it came from Peter's relationship with Jesus Christ!

In ch3 and 4, Luke puts great emphasis on the name of Jesus. Of course, a name implies much more than just identification – it carries with it authority, reputation and power. If somebody tells you, "You can use my name!" you certainly hope the name is worth using! If the President issues an order to his White House staff, they are obligated to obey it. If I were to go on a tour of the White House and started barking order at the staff, I would be ignored because my name has no official authority behind it. But that is not the case with Jesus!

**Matt 28:18** tells us that the name of Jesus has all authority behind it because He is the Son of God. Paul goes on to tell us in **Phil 2:9-11** that the name of Jesus is above every name and because of this He deserves to be worshipped and obeyed. It was the power of Jesus' name, delegated to Peter through his relationship with Jesus that was based on repentance, faith and obedience, which brought healing to Lt. Dan. Sadly, many believers today offer up some of the most selfish and self-centered prayers and think they're just fine because they tag them with a "in Jesus' name" at the end as though it was some kind of lucky talisman or that it sanctified their selfishness. The power doesn't come from saying the name Jesus; the power only comes when we dwell in His life and He dwells in ours. The power comes through a shared relationship that honors and glorifies His name by and with our lives. The great concern of the early Christians was to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ. That same goal should be ours too!

When Peter reached down and took his hand and lifted him up, Dr. Luke tells us in specific medical language how strength flowed into Lt. Dan so that his feet and ankles could now support his weight. "Lt. Dan, You got new legs!" What Luke is telling us is that he was completely restored to health –

health he had never experienced before. But, although he had never used his legs before, he knew exactly what to do with them! He was so exuberant in his new-found health that he jumped right up like he was sitting on a spring and was immediately subdued, too embarrassed to be perceived as being “preachy” or too “religious.” No, that didn’t seem to cross his mind at all. Luke says he entered the temple with Peter and John and was walking, leaping and praising God!

Imagine – this man’s physical limitations had prevented him from entering the temple his entire life – he was legally and socially barred from it. But now, through the authority of Jesus Christ, he no longer had those limitations and he could walk right into the temple and he did just that. This was a great day and the people in the temple, who knew this man because they had gone in and out of the gate many times and had regularly tried to ignore him; well, they were filled with amazement and probably praised God a little themselves! Everyone understood at once what had happened. A miracle had taken place by the same power that had been displayed in the resurrection of Jesus and on the day of Pentecost.

**11**- As soon as Lt. Dan was healed, he did 3 good things: 1<sup>st</sup>-he attached himself to the apostles; 2<sup>nd</sup>-he immediately began to use what God had given him and, 3<sup>rd</sup>-he began to praise and worship God. Now we see that he is still holding on to Peter and John. Why is that? We know he can walk so he’s not holding onto them for support. Maybe it’s just out of gratitude, maybe it’s out of fear of the gathering crowd or maybe, just maybe, he still wants to know where this supernatural power came from. I think he’s more interested than ever in hearing what Peter has to say.

We’ll look at Peter’s sermon next time but we really need to flesh out the picture Luke provides in the life of this man.

It’s obvious that this man’s life is a wonderful illustration of what salvation is like. This man was born lame through no fault of his own. In the same way, all of us are born with an inherent inability to walk in such a way as to please God. Just like Lt. Dan, it’s through no fault of our own. You see, our first father Adam had a fall and because of that fall, he came up crippled – by sin. Adam then passed on his lameness to all of his descendants - and we perfected it.

Why do dogs bark? They bark because they’re dogs. Why do roosters

crow? Because they're roosters! You can no more stop a rooster from crowing than you can a dog from barking. They do it because it's their nature. In fact, the only way to stop a rooster from crowing is to put him in a pot with dumplings. Why do we sin? Because we're sinners! We inherited our sin nature from Adam and then we proceed to show him how to use it! The point is, we're all in the same boat. We start out in the hole as sinners and then just keep digging away.

Lt. Dan was also poor and as sinners, we're totally bankrupt before God, unable to pay the outrageously high debt we owe Him. Lt. Dan was also outside the temple and just like him, all sinners are separated from God because of their sin, no matter how close to the door they might be. Just being familiar with Jesus doesn't bring new life; recognizing your need, turning from sin and turning to Him in faith is what bring salvation.

Maybe your watching today and your life feels more like Lt. Dan's before he met Peter and John. You feel you are no longer able to stand up under the weight of all the bad decisions you've made in your life – the weight of all the self-seeking you have pursued. Living to satisfy yourself only leaves you empty and weak. Living for your own purposes leaves you hollow and always craving more – it never brings satisfaction. Eventually, the weight of sin and guilt becomes too much to bear. If that describes your life, won't you place yourself under the authority of Jesus Christ and allow Him to make you into a new person today? That is His desire for your life. You might just be looking for God to get you out of your current bind but God has much bigger plans for you than that. He's not willing just to support you in your current condition – He wants to put you in a better condition, a better life.

Consider this: this man was born lame and had been that way for some time. Apparently, his friends had been bringing him to the temple for some time as well. Here's the thing – how many times did Jesus pass by this man on His way in and out of the temple? Why didn't He just heal him then? Well, first off – God's timing is just as important as God's will but also, it was clearly for the greater glory of God that Jesus would heal this man from heaven through His apostles. Jesus didn't just want to give him new legs – He wanted to give him new life; he wanted to make him a new creation in Himself. That's what Jesus wants to do for you today. Will you allow Him to?

