



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 3:1-26

Acts

"The First Miracle"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] If you have your Bibles open, turn to Acts chapter 3 and we are going to look at verses 1 through 26. If you're visiting, the day of Pentecost has occurred. The believers have gathered in Jerusalem, 120 of them in the upper room, they've prayed and at God's time on that day, He sent the Spirit. Christ poured out the Spirit on the church. The apostles and the others were filled with the Spirit. They spoke in other tongues, they went out and proclaimed the truth, and Peter gave a magnificent sermon in chapter 2, and a multitude of people came to faith – over 3,000 – and then we read at the end of chapter 2 that many were being added to the church daily.

Well, we come to another day in the life of the church, in the life of the apostles, and we read in verse 1 of chapter 3:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!"

And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up, and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk. He entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has granted him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore, repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

"Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He

says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these things. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of study in it. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the Scriptures that we have read. We thank you for the whole Word of God which is your inerrant revelation to us, and apart from your Word, apart from that revelation, we could not know you. We could not know our lost condition, we could not know the way of life through Jesus Christ. We would be dead in our trespasses and sins to this day, lost forever. What a privilege it is, Father, to possess your inerrant Word, to read it as we have just done. And so, Father, we pray now that you would bless us as we study it together.

We thank you that we not only have possession of your Word but we have the third person of the Trinity who dwells within each and every believer in Jesus Christ. At the moment of faith, our hearts were sealed with the Spirit. He dwells within us permanently to protect us, to guide us through this life, and to teach us. He is the anointing, as John says, and because we have Him, we need no teacher. He is our teacher, and He illuminates the page of Scripture for us, and we praise you for that. We praise Him for that, and we pray for that ministry this morning, that the Scriptures might be made clear to us as we study them, that we might know the meaning of the text and the application of it to our lives, and we pray that you'd make that application and make that meaning known.

We pray for ourselves spiritually in this hour. We pray also, Lord, for the needs that we have of a material kind and there are many. We pray for those who are sick, and there are others, Father, who are in need physically and in other ways. We pray for those who are without work. We pray that you'd supply their need and give them direction and open doors of employment for them. We pray for the discouraged. Sometimes life can be very discouraging, and yet never is there reason for your children to despair because all things work together for our good because you cause them to work together for our good.

So encourage those who are discouraged. Help them to look to Christ, the author and perfecter of faith, to reflect on all that He's done for His people and what we have in Him. And may we reflect on that this morning as we study this magnificent text and great miracle that occurred. Encourage us in the faith.

We pray for our meeting this evening. We pray you'd bless it and we pray that our fellowship in that meeting would be rich, that you'd teach us. Bless those who participate and bless our reception afterwards as we visit with one another. May it honor you and bless us in our relationships with one another. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Charles Wesley has been called the sweet singer of Methodism and was probably the most gifted of all English hymn writers. He composed over 7,000 hymns. That's a lot of hymns. Of all of them, one of the favorites is "O for a Thousand Tongues." We sing it often. "Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ; ye blind, behold your savior come, and leap, ye lame, for joy." Our passage, Acts 3, was inspired by that text with the healing of the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. The point of the hymn is that we should be joyful.

We should be full of praise for all of the many spiritual blessings that we have received in Jesus Christ, which is what characterizes a church and a life that is governed by the Holy Spirit.

We saw that in chapter 2, which concludes with believers meeting with gladness and sincerity of heart and praising God. That joy, that praise, continues in the third chapter with the lame man who jumped for joy around the temple. It was one of a number of miracles that had happened since Pentecost. Luke wrote in verse 43 of chapter 2 that many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Many occurred, but you'll notice they occurred through the apostles because they were Christ's works, His power, a continuation of His ministry through those men. And they were additional proofs to His Messiahship and to the fact that He is the great physician who heals the soul. That's the real subject here, Christ and His power to save illustrated and authenticated in this miracle. It is the first miracle that Luke records in detail, and he chose this one to develop because it gained unusual publicity. It occasioned Peter's second sermon, and it led to the first persecution of the church.

It happened at the ninth hour or 3:00 in the afternoon, which is the time just after the afternoon sacrifice when devoted Jews would gather at the temple and pray, and so it's called the hour of prayer. The church had been meeting in the temple daily, and Peter and John had been there, had met with the church, and were now going into the prayer service in the temple itself to pray with the company of the Jewish people. And as they did that, they met a man who was lame from his mother's womb. Luke records the encounter in the detail that we might expect from a physician, which he was, and which stresses that the man's condition was so serious that it was beyond the help of doctors.

He was crippled from birth. He had to be carried along. All he was able to do for himself was to sit and beg, and so every day friends or family would carry him to the temple where he would sit at the gate called Beautiful and ask for alms.

Many commentators identify the Beautiful Gate with the main eastern entrance into the temple from the court of the Gentiles. Josephus describes it as made of bronze and of such excellent

workmanship that, in his words, it far exceeded in value those gates that were plated with silver and set in gold. It was a prime location for begging, similar to what a tourist would see today in Jerusalem at the Damascus Gate, which is the main entrance into the Arab Quarter of the old city and a place where blind and lame beggars sit day after day. People who regularly pass through that gate become very familiar with those who are sitting there, and it was the same at the Beautiful Gate in the days of the apostles.

This man was a fixture there. It was a busy place, and over the years the people who had passed in and out of that gate going into the temple to worship and returning home from worship became very familiar with this man. They knew him, they knew the details of his physical condition, and as Peter and John were entering the gate, he saw them and began asking for alms, hoping that they might drop a few coins in his lap as they moved along with the push of the crowd. Instead, Peter and John stopped, looked at him very intently, the text says that Peter fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us." It must have seemed to the man to be a good sign. Most people didn't do that.

Most people didn't take the time to stop and speak. They were in a hurry to get in and out of the temple. They might drop some coins in his lap but they didn't stop to look at him, pay attention to him, speak to him. These men did, and so he was hoping for some shekels when he was suddenly let down as Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold." But before his disappointment could sink in, Peter went on to say, "But what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Walk." And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up, and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

With a leap he stood upright and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. In an instant, this man who had never taken a step in his life, whose legs had atrophied into little sticks, was standing, leaping, walking. It was an obvious miracle and one that really sets the standard for modern-

day faith healers and those who claim that the gifts of the apostles are for the church today. If people today have the same powers of the apostles, that which they had, then they should be able to do just what the apostles did, heal on command and without fail.

That doesn't happen, and so when it doesn't happen, those who claim to be able to heal place the blame on the afflicted due to their lack of faith. It's interesting if you notice here, there's no mention of faith in the miracle itself. Peter simply gives the command and he pulls the man up. Now, later in verse 16 Peter does mention faith. He says it's on the basis of faith in His name that the miracle occurred, but Peter doesn't say who had the faith. He doesn't say if it's the faith of the man who was healed or the faith of Peter and John.

Some commentators believe that it's the faith of Peter that is being referred to; others such as F. F. Bruce suggest that both are referred to, the faith of the man who was healed and the faith of Peter. But the point is that for one to heal, those who are healing must have faith in Christ, and so when a healing does not take place by a so-called healer, perhaps the blame should be placed on his lack of faith. There's nothing of that here. When Christ healed and His apostles healed, there were no failures. That's characteristic of the healing of the gospels in the book of Acts.

Peter simply commanded the man to stand, then took his hand, pulled him up, and as he did, strength entered the man's feet and ankles and he stood. It was a powerful, undeniable work of God. It was a messianic miracle. It was a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah prophesied this. He prophesied in Isaiah 35:6 that when the Messiah comes, great things are going to happen, and one of those great miracles would be then the lame will leap like a deer. And here, the lame leap, which proves that the Messiah had come and proved that those who represented Him, His apostles, spoke the truth – which was the purpose of the healing.

The miracles of the gospels and the miracles of the book of Acts were signs. They pointed beyond themselves. They were not a

miracle for their own sake. They were wonders that authenticated the person and the message of Christ and His representatives, His apostles, who were to witness to Him. What passes today for healing falls far short of this and often has the purpose of nothing more than profit at the expense of the poor and the despairing. Peter and John made no money off this. They had no money, they asked for no money, everything was free, which is unusual. We're used to people in religion making money off religion; none of that took place with the apostles.

There's a story that comes down to us from the period of the Renaissance that has been told in different versions about Thomas Aquinas, the great doctor of the Catholic church, who once called on the pope, Pope Innocent II, when the pope was counting a large sum of money. "You see, Thomas," the pope said, "the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none,'" to which Thomas replied, "True, holy father, but neither can she now say, 'Rise and walk.'" It's easy for Protestants who have visited the Vatican and seen the vast amounts of art and treasure to see the point here. If you've been there, you know what I mean. Unimagined wealth.

In fact, there's so much gold and silver that it becomes rather boring to look at. So we can read that story and think of it and see the point, but the moral of the tale applies to us as well. There's a danger in acquiring wealth and enjoying temporal prosperity, and often that seems to be the great push of many ministries. The power of the church, though, has never been in wealth or in size. Now, that can be a blessing, and when wealth comes our way, we can assume it's from God and can be used if it comes from the right hands. But also, it can be a terrible diversion and steal our hearts.

The strength and effectiveness of the people of God has always been and will always be in faithfulness to the Word of God. One Augustinian monk shook the great Church of Rome, shook the western world on October 31st, 1517, when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Just one man but he stood for the

truth. And if such a change is ever to come again, if we are to see a real reformation, it will be in the same way, with an uncompromising proclamation of the Word of God. That's where our power lies.

That's what characterized these apostles. They were bold men of the truth. They didn't have silver and gold; they didn't need silver and gold to do the work that they did. They had the power of the Holy Spirit within them and the truth of God's Word.

I was reading an article that Dr. Johnson wrote recently and he began the article with a quote from J. Gresham Machen, one of the leading founders of Westminster Theological Seminary, who said, "Indifference to doctrine makes no heroes of the faith." Now, Machen was a hero of the faith. He was a man who stood against liberalism in the earlier part of this century and took a bold stand and could do that but be a hero of the faith because he knew the Word of God, knew it quite well. It is as we study the Word of God, it's as we learn the doctrines of Scripture, it's as we learn and believe in the whole counsel of God that we are made strong.

When David Livingstone was on his way to Africa, he wrote to one of the directors of the London Missionary Society that he spent most of his time at sea studying theology. It was through the strength of that knowledge of God, he said, that he became a prodigy of patience, faith, and courage. Doctrine gives strength. It makes heroes. And John and Peter were heroes of the faith. They knew God. Christ was in them. They walked by the Spirit and they proclaimed the truth.

And the events there in Jerusalem at the gate called Beautiful led to a great proclamation of the truth. The behavior of the lame man was hardly in keeping with the solemn dignity of the temple and quickly caught the attention of the people as he was leaping around, shouting praises to God, and so a curious crowd gathered around these three men and Luke writes that the people were full of amazement. They recognized the man as the lame beggar at the gate and knew that what had happened to him was no fraud, it was no gimmick, it was a genuine miracle.

Peter saw the amazement in their faces and wasted no time in explaining that what had happened was a sign. It was no miracle of their doing. "Don't stare at us," he says, "as if we have some special power or skill at healing or as though we have some special piety that brought this about. This isn't our doing. This is God's work, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus." You'll notice he doesn't say "has healed this man." No, he says "has glorified his servant Jesus." In other words, this is all about Him, this is all about Christ. It was God's way of demonstrating His approval of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Peter then begins his second sermon in which, true to apostolic preaching, he speaks of Christ. Jesus Christ is the subject of his sermon. Doesn't explicitly cite a passage in this sermon as he did in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost where he quoted Joel 2 and Psalms 16 and 110. He does speak explicitly of some texts later in the sermon. But it's very clear at the beginning of the sermon that the text that he is drawing upon is a key Old Testament passage, which they would have been familiar with, and it's clear from the way he describes Christ.

He calls him God's servant, which is no doubt a reference to Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53, which describes the Messiah as the obedient and suffering servant of the Lord. Isaiah begins that portion of his prophecy, "Behold, my servant will prosper. He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted." The servant. What a picture of the Christ, the eternal Son of God. The prince of life, as Peter will call him. He stooped from that exalted position. He emptied Himself to become a servant and suffer for us. It's clear that Peter had this great servant passage of Isaiah in mind, not only from the words that he uses but also from the outline of his sermon because it follows that of Isaiah's.

Isaiah first describes the servant as glorified by God, exalted, he said, and then he gives the details of His sufferings, how He was pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities,

and Peter develops his sermon in the same way. "The God of Abraham has glorified His servant Jesus." So he begins by speaking of how He has been glorified, exalted, and then he gives the details of His suffering, just as Isaiah did. And he did so boldly. This is so characteristic of Peter's preaching, preaching of the apostles. It's as though they stand alone among all these people and preach this boldly by laying all the responsibility for His suffering squarely on his audience.

"The one whom God glorified is," he says, "the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him." A pagan governor was willing to release Christ. He had seen that this was an innocent man. He wanted to wash his hands of it all. He was willing to release Him, but they wouldn't allow it. They forced Pilate's hand, disowned the holy one and righteous one, he said, and put to death the prince of life. That last statement, "put to death the prince of life," has been called an amazing paradox and a striking oxymoron. The prince of life – or author of life, as it can be translated – put to death.

That is a contrast, which both magnifies the greatness of their guilt and the greatness of His person. The prince of life, the author of life, can be none other than God Himself, the Creator of all life, both physical and spiritual life, which Jesus is. John tells us that everything that came into being came into being through Him. He is the giver of life, which raises the question: How could they possibly put such a one as that to death? How could any man or army of men put to death deity? Well, only by His permission and according to His Will. It was for that death that He became a man. Deity cannot die.

God cannot be put to death, but God became man and in His humanity, He suffered death, and He did so by His Will, only by His permission. In fact, Peter says in verse 18 that all these things were prophesied by the prophets that the Christ should suffer, and He has done that, He has fulfilled it. That was God's Will, that was His eternal plan. Jesus Himself said of His life in John chapter 10, "No

one takes it away from me; I lay it down on my own initiative." So that was God's eternal plan of salvation, for Christ to lay down His life willingly as a sacrifice and for the Father to restore that life to Him in the resurrection. A fact, Peter says, to which we are witnesses.

Read through the book of Acts, you read the sermons that the apostles preached, and at the heart of all those sermons are the cross and the empty tomb. The atoning sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection from the dead, and he comes back to that same theme, which he developed so clearly in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost. He's alive, we have witnessed it, he said, and this miracle is an evidence of it. He is the reason for the miracle. He gave life to the lame man's dead legs and He did it, Peter says in verse 16, on the basis of faith in His name. God's blessings are received through faith alone.

Christ is both the object of faith and He is the source of faith, that's what Peter says in verse 16. It is the faith which comes through Him, through Christ. So Christ is the one to whom faith looks and the one through whom faith comes. He is the object of it, He is the source of it, Christ was the whole subject matter of Peter's sermon. He directed the crowd's attention away from the man who had been healed, he directed the crowd's attention away from himself and away from John, he directed the crowd's attention to Jesus Christ because if the crowd was to be healed of its spiritual lameness, then it must look to Christ alone. Only in that way could the people have the life of God and the forgiveness of sin.

That was the reason for the miracle. Didn't happen merely to give this man some physical and temporal blessing, as good as that was, but it happened to confirm to the people that Jesus Christ is the Savior. That was the purpose of all of our Lord's miracles. You go back to the gospels, you see that.

One striking example of that is in Mark chapter 2 when he healed the paralytic. You remember the story. He's in a house,

crowds have come in, there's no way to get in, it is so filled with people, and so these men who'd brought their paralyzed friend used their ingenuity. They climbed up on the roof, they pulled the roof apart, and they lowered this man down into the house in front of our Lord and, seeing their faith, the first thing that He said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Now, that man hadn't come there to have his sins forgiven. His friends hadn't brought the man there for that purpose, at least it's not stated if they did.

And there were scribes in the audience who heard the Lord say these amazing words, "Your sins are forgiven." They were always there, watching our Lord, investigating Him to see if there wasn't some reason for attack or criticism. They were offended by His words, and they said to themselves, "He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sin but God alone?" And they were right in that fact, that only God can forgive sins, but to prove to them that He was not blaspheming and that He is God with the authority to forgive sins and give life, He said to the man, "Get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

And immediately, Mark said, he got up and picked up the pallet and went out – proving that He can and does forgive sins and here, the healing of this lame man proved the same thing, it proves the authority that Christ has to forgive and to save sinners. He is the prince of life who gives spiritual life to all who believe in Him, which brings Peter to the point of his sermon. The crowd needed that life, and Peter had highlighted their guilt and sin in order to show them their need, not to accuse them and condemn them. In fact, in verse 17, Peter concedes that they acted in ignorance. The Lord Himself said that from the cross, "they know not what they do."

But ignorance did not give them relief from the burden of guilt. It could only give them a time of reprieve from judgment to allow them an opportunity to repent, and now they knew the truth. God had exonerated His Son with the resurrection. There were ample witnesses to the reality of that fact. Miracles had occurred in Jerusalem – a

number of miracles had occurred. This one miracle itself is said to have glorified Jesus Christ. So their ignorance was no longer an excuse. The truth was known and it was time to act upon that truth. It was time to repent, and that is what Peter tells them to do, change their attitude and bring it in line with God's.

"Repent," he said, "and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Repentance is a change of mind. It is not sorrow for sin. It is not feeling guilty or bad for sin. Judas felt all of that and it led to his suicide, not to repentance. Now, sorrow for sin will certainly, I think, accompany repentance when one understands the gravity of sin, but repentance is essentially a change of mind, a turning from a wrong idea or way, and that is what Peter urges. Repenting of their sin and turning to God. "Repent and return," he said, and blessings would follow. He lists them.

First of all, he says, their sins would be forgiven. "Repent, so that your sins may be wiped away." They would be erased. They would be obliterated. They would be washed off. The same word that's used here and in the Greek text – it's a single word, it's a compound verb – is found in Revelation 7:17 of God wiping away every tear from our eyes, this great promise that we have, someday God will wipe away every tear. In fact, that promise is given to us twice in the book of Revelation. The word is also used in Revelation 3:5 of the Lord's refusal to erase our names from the book of life. But that's the idea of the word, to erase.

What God does with our sin and guilt is illustrated by the way the ancients would reuse their papyrus manuscripts. Papyrus was something like the paper that we have today. It's not paper; it's made out of reeds that were grown in the marshes along the Nile River.

It was used by the Egyptians and the Greeks and the Romans for their manuscripts, but it was rather valuable, much more valuable than paper is to us. So they would reuse the manuscripts when they could, and they were able to do that because the ink that was used then had

no acid in it, and so it didn't bite into the papyrus as modern ink does. It simply lay on the top of it, so to erase the writing and reuse the material, a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe away the ink and remove the words.

That's a picture of what happens when we are saved, when we are justified. God declares us righteous in His sight. It is as if He wipes the slate clean of all of our sins. In fact, Paul said in Colossians 2 that He canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us. All of our sins, as it were, written on a great scroll or written on a great slate, and He came along and simply wiped them away, washed it clean. The result is they're gone for the believer in Jesus Christ. Removed as far as the east is from the west, cast behind His back, cast into the depths of the sea, never to be seen again. All of that as a result of what Jesus Christ did on the cross and faith alone in Him.

How amazing that is. We should consider that carefully, what He has done. He doesn't demand of us some great work in which we work off our sins, in which we pay the penalty in some way. We can't do that; the penalty is too great. What he requires of us is simply to trust in Him as the one who has already removed those sins, finished the work, accomplished it. That's grace.

That is what Peter urges them to do, to receive grace, to receive forgiveness of even the very worst of sins, and that is what the putting to death of the prince of life was. It is the very worst of sins, the most heinous crime to ever be committed, and yet He offers them forgiveness for that, and when they trust in Him, when they receive that forgiveness, he says then will come times of refreshing from the Lord. There's nothing more refreshing than forgiveness and the removal of guilt, and that is what Peter was promising.

But a particular day of refreshing, the future day of national blessing when the Jewish people turn to Christ in faith and He returns to establish His millennial kingdom on earth is what Paul promises in Romans 11 where he describes Israel's present condition of unbelief to

be like that of branches that have been broken off of an olive tree, but he writes in verse 23 of Romans 11: "They also, if they do not continue in their unbelief" – in other words, if they turn, if they repent, if they trust in Christ – "will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

That is what he promises will happen in verse 26: "All Israel will be saved," he writes. "The Deliverer will come from Zion, and He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." That is the inducement to faith that Peter offers in verses 20 and 21. Repent. Turn, he said, that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you. That is when the restoration of all things, the kingdom will come and this time of refreshment.

There's nothing that Peter says here in this sermon that was new, nothing that was novel. God spoke about these things through the prophets. They all prophesied Christ. Moses did and he quotes Moses in verse 22, Moses' words that are found in Deuteronomy 18:15 where he spoke of a prophet that God would raise up like Himself and they were to listen to this prophet, this future person. If they did not, Moses said, judgment would come.

That prophet is Christ, and He had come, and they had not listened to Him, and so judgment would come. But God had given them a second opportunity to believe. He is longsuffering and His amazing grace is seen in all of this, seen in verse 26, the last verse of our text, where Peter says, "For you first, God raised up His servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

Now, these are those who had rejected Christ, who had disowned Him, who had chosen a murderer, chosen Barabbas over Him and put Him to death, yet God sent Christ first to them and was still offering them forgiveness, even for the worst of sins. If they would only believe, there would come times of refreshing. And what was true of the Jews of Peter's day is true of the Jew or the Gentile today. Whoever repents and turns to the Lord will be saved regardless of how great his or her sin may be. The blood of Jesus Christ is of sufficient

value for the greatest of sins, for the greatest number of sins. It is of infinite value and those who believe in Him experience times of refreshing, times of joy.

That's what John Bunyan described in *Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian finally arrived at the Wicket Gate with that great burden of sin on his back and looked to the cross. When he did, the burden was loosed and fell from his shoulders and tumbled down the hill into a sepulcher and was seen no more. Then he was stripped of his filthy rags and dressed in clean, new clothing. It was all a way of saying that his sins were wiped away, buried and seen no more, and he was clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Bunyan writes, "Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing."

That's what the gospel is about, the forgiveness of sin, life everlasting, and joy. The kind of joy that should make us leap like the lame man and praise God. Praise God because it is all of Him. Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end, from eternity to eternity. It is all God's work.

That's what this miracle is about. This miracle really is a parable on grace, an illustration of salvation. The lame man didn't seek it. He didn't even seek healing. All he wanted was a couple of coins from Peter and John, and if that was all he had received, he would have been satisfied, we never would have heard his name, and he would have continued on in his lameness. But he received what he wasn't seeking. Life was given to his dead legs and life was given to his dead soul – that's how grace works. It plucks us like brands from the fire.

If you're saved, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, it is for that reason. You weren't seeking Christ. He found you and plucked you out of your lost condition and gave you life forever, and that ought to fill you with joy.

Well, have you experienced that? Or are you here still clothed in spiritual rags with that great burden of sin on your back? The only way it can be removed is to look to the cross, to repent and return, as

Peter said. So look to Christ. Seek Him. If the lame man found Christ when he wasn't looking for Him, when he wasn't seeking, what will happen if you do seek Him? The promise is given that you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. So search. Seek and you will find. He will make you to find Him. Only He can do that.

So may God help you to do that and help all of us who know Jesus Christ, who have been found by Him, who have been plucked as brands from the fire, to rejoice in the knowledge of that. Rejoice in His grace, rejoice in the forgiveness that He has given to us, the life that He has given to us that can never be taken from us, and may we leap – within our hearts, at least, leap for joy because of grace. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. Thank you for all that we have in Jesus Christ for we were just like that lame man, who was lame from birth, who was born without ability, we were born spiritually lame, spiritually dead, unable to come, unable to understand, unable to see even the lameness of our condition. But in your grace, you gave sight to the blind, spiritually. You gave strength to the lame, spiritually. You gave life to us and brought us to a saving knowledge of your Son. You gave us life that can never be taken away. We thank you for that. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and it's in His name we pray. Amen.