Preparing to Teach Acts 2 and 3
“In Jerusalem with Springs Reaching Out to the World”

The first chapter of Acts ends with the “Twelve” replenished by the selection of Matthias. Just as there were twelve tribes to express all of Israel and Jesus called twelve disciples to establish His church, there needed to be twelve apostles to signify this step forward in expanding God’s kingdom. The verb (a passive participle) used to express the idea of Pentecost arriving in all of its fullness is **συμπληρο͡υσθαι** and it has the root verb of filling something up completely. I believe it signifies a built-in connotation that the Day of Pentecost arrived in fullness, the most appropriate time. And I’m really thankful that the Bible uses this verb in verse 1 because it reminds me, right off the bat, that believers who want to function with God-given power have to wait until God’s timing comes about. We can certainly create a lot of confusion and frustration if we get ahead of God.

As for Pentecost, it was an annual festival, held 50 days (hence the name) after Passover where all of the males of Israel were required to appear before God in Jerusalem (See Exodus 34:21-24; Leviticus 23:15-21; and Deuteronomy 16:9-12). So, that word for filling up completely might also apply to how literally full Jerusalem was at the point—a target-rich environment for the apostle evangelists. At one point, the festival was primarily a celebration of the harvest, but by Luke’s time “…it had become occasion for the Jews to commemorate the giving of the law at Sinai.” [Arrington, French L., *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 20.]

While this may seem like mere background information, I believe it is very significant, as per the following scholar: “The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Christians during the Pentecost festival also marked the Christians as the new Israel (Acts 2:1-13). …And the fact that Luke combines this incident with the selection of a twelfth apostle indicates that the Pentecost episode symbolizes God’s creation of a new people.” [Blevins, William G., “The Early Church: Acts 1-5” in *Review & Expositor 71:4* (Fall, 1974) (Louisville, KY: Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 469.

There is also some ambiguity as to the reference to “all” in verse 1. They were all in the same place. Because the specific manifestations of the Holy Spirit are specifically demonstrated by Peter and the other apostles in verse 14, some interpreters take this to mean that only the apostles were in the same place. If the whole church had assembled in the same place, perhaps for safety or power in numbers, that could possibly provide an occasion representing the 500 to whom Christ had appeared according to 1 Corinthians 15:6 [Munck, Johannes, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967.], p. 14]. It seems a big leap from the 120 with which the church began on that day to 500, though. I personally think the emphasis seems to be on the apostolic mission as opposed to the church as a whole, but the text doesn’t exclude the church as a whole and some suggest that there were 120 believers or more affected [Du Veill, Carolus Maria, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. Haddon, 1851), p. 33; Gloag, Paton J. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), p. 71.] Lightfoot, John B. *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. F. Dove, 1823), p. 49; Smith, T. C., “Acts” in Allen, Clifton J. (ed.), *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 10: Acts-1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 25].

It is when we get to verse 2 that we get to the most dramatic portion of the text. Luke uses vivid imagery and describes the events in terms of at least three of our physical senses. But before we get to verse 2 specifically, I want to remind you that the description of all this fascinating phenomena is, in terms of number of verses in the chapter, outnumbered more than 2:1 by the sermon that explains them [Tiede, David L. “Expository Note: Acts 2:1-47” in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 33:1* (January, 1979) (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 64].

I also want to share with you a little exercise to help you understand the symbolism. [I am uploading a separate document with this exercise on the church website.] Let’s look at the Old Testament and discover some of the ways God telegraphed the divine presence. In Exodus 3:2, there is obviously fire in the burning bush passage. In Exodus 13:21-22, God guides with a column of cloud by day and column of fire by night. As Moses communes with God on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19), we read of thunder, lightning, cloud cover, the mountain trembling as per an earthquake, and God providing fire. In 1 Kings 19, we have the opposite effect as we are told that God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire (though God does speak with a voice of crushed silence). In Psalm 104, God shows His power with fire and a chariot of whirlwind. In Isaiah 66:15, we have both fire and wind. In Ezekiel 1:4, the prophet experiences wind, a cloud, lightning, and fire in His encounter with God.

So, what are we to make of this. First of all, Luke loves to use an unusual term for “suddenly.” It is different than the one used by Mark for “immediately.” Luke uses it in 16:26 for the earthquake in the jail at Philippi and in 28:6 when the observers expected Paul to “suddenly” fall dead of the poisonous viper bite. So, this suggests the idea of something unexpected and uncommon rushing in. Next, I don’t know about you, but I would expect the wind to be felt before the sound occurred. Yet, verse 2 emphasizes that the sound came in first rather than the wind. Luke uses an archaic word usually referring to the roaring of the sea [Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume III: Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 20.]. If you look closely at the phonetic spelling, **ἦχος = “EH-kohs,”** you might hear our English word “echo.” For me, the significance of this would be that those in the room heard a powerful, unexpected sound without distinguishing words. It seems like that’s how God was getting their attention.

So, they hear something happening and then, they see something happening. The next sign is often neglected. I myself have tried to translate **διαμεριζόμεναι** as “distributed” when it seems to mean “divided” tongues as of fire. “Divided” can be taken in a number of ways and I’ll get to that, but first, let’s consider the use of fire. Fire can consume (as in destroy); fire can transform (as in cooking or tempering), and fire can cleanse (as in cauterizing).

But before we go into ancient sources, let me share something I read last week when I was researching something else. I thought it was a very nice way of expressing the relevance of fire in the church. “Churches ‘on fire’ with the Spirit cannot contain themselves, any more than a forest fire can stop itself from catching. Fires spread, not according to plan, but according to the availability of combustible tinder. Christianity likewise has a boundary-crossing, outward-reaching, other-oriented impulse modeled by Jesus himself, formally taken up by the church when the disciples ‘caught fire’ with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.” [Dean, Kenda Creasy, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010], p. 64.] Or, you might prefer the wording of an older commentator: “Their appearance in the form of fire might be intended to denote the zeal and inspiration which were to be kindled in the breasts of the disciples, and to be manifested in their lives.” [Gloag, p. 73]

We know that fire was used very carefully in ancient medicine. Here’s a quotation from that famous ancient doctor, Hippocrates (of “Hippocratic Oath” fame): “Those diseases that medicines do not cure are cured by the knife. Those that the knife does not cure are cured by fire. Those that the fire does not cure must be considered incurable.” [quoted in Henning, Meghan R., “Holy Impairment: The Body as the Nexus of Apocalyptic Ekphrasis in Acts 2:1-13” in *Journal of Biblical Literature 141:3* (July, 2022) (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2022), p. 546.]

In addition, the physician Galen associated “heat” with “speech,” citing children as having more internal heat such that they were able to verbalize easier [Henning, pp. 546-547.] I like that idea a lot when thinking of the tongues as of fire at Pentecost. When we are warmed internally by the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but speak out and speak up for the Lord Jesus.

But I promised to share something about the divided idea with the tongues. As I’ve noted before, I have always taken A. T. Robertson’s suggestion that the division here is a distribution among the apostles [Robertson, p. 21.]. That is a possible interpretation, but there are two more which are possible. One possibility is that an actual cloven tongue is meant [Du Veill, p. 34]. That isn’t because God would speak with a “forked tongue,” but because many symbols of healing in the ancient world are associated with the serpent. Don’t believe me? Think of the medical symbol we still use today—Asclepius’ staff with the serpent wrapped around it. Or consider this stone relief where a patient is first operated on with a scalpel and later, during the healing process, he is pictured as being ministered to by a snake in the same wound.



Now, why would Luke use a symbology from pagan religion like that? Remember that Luke is a physician. He would be well aware of the symbolism. But he is also a Christian. Where the “serpent” was credited with supernatural healing in most of the world, Luke knows that the real healing, the real power, comes from God. So, when he wants to show the power of God, he uses the image but changes it into fiery form. I don’t know if this is why the fiery tongues were divided, but it is a possibility.

But I have a better possibility. Some interpreters have noted that Acts 2 is ALMOST the opposite of Genesis 11 [Willimon, William H., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 32]. Remember the Ziggurat of Babel, how the populace was planning to build a structure that would bring them into God’s Presence? Remember also how the text says that God had to come down to see what they were doing? And God realized that humankind, communicating clearly with each other and following their sinful ways, could wreak a lot of havoc on the world. So, God divided them up into different languages. In fact, when Acts 1:6 says that the crowd was “bewildered” or “confused,” it uses the same word that is used in the Greek translation, the Septuagint of Genesis 11 [Henning, p. 548].

The reversal of Babel is NOT that God made one language [Willimon, p. 32]. There was still confusion. But the reversal is that instead of being driven apart, God has now filled up His emissaries to cross boundaries so that everyone can hear in their own language. The division implied in the fiery tongues was for the missionary purpose of reaching out. In this sense, I can readily see the insight of Ralph P. Martin who associated this communication with the prophecy of Isaiah 66:18 where God says He will gather all nations and all languages to demonstrate His glory [Martin, Ralph P. *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students: Volume 2: The Acts, The Letters, The Apocalypse: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 73].

That what these filled believers said was intended to be understood is clear from the use of the term “utterance” at the conclusion of verse 4 where “The Spirit kept on giving utterance to them.” [Pastor Johnny’s Translation] because the term αποφέγγεσθαι doesn’t merely indicate ordinary speech, but intelligible speech [Arrington, p. 23; Robertson, pp. 21-22]. In addition, Du Veill quotes the 17th century bishop, Tarnovius, as stating: “so to utter a speech that there should be a great efficacy In every

word, and much wisdom contained in every period." [Du Veill, p. 35]

And while we’re talking about those fiery tongues, note that they are said to be “resting” on the apostles. This is an important verb because its basic form is usually to have the idea of sitting on thrones to judge as in Revelation [Henning, pp. 547-548]. However, the modified form used here as “resting” implies lasting authority. The church leaders are receiving lasting authority to be able to move forward with their mission, “…replacing the Shekinah (‘glory of God’) thought in rabbinic Judaism to rest and remain on students of the Torah (cf. Mishnah, ‘Aboth 3:2 ‘if two [students] sit together and words of the Law [are spoken] between them, the Divine Presence rests between them.’” [Martin, pp. 73-74]

As with the listing of groups from “every nation under heaven,” one has to believe that Luke is either depending upon a list similar to that of Tacitus in The Annals (Book II, Paragraph 60): “King Rhamses [Ramses] conquered Libya, Ethiopia, Media [Medea], Persia, Bactria, and Scythia, and held under his sway the countries inhabited by the Syrians, Armenians, and the neighbours [neighbors], the Cappadocians, from the Bithynian to the Lycian Sea.” [Tacitus, *The Annals*. Church, Alfred John and Brodribb, William Jackson (trans.) (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), pp. 38-29] or of Curtius Rufus 6.3.3: “We have made ourselves masters of Caria, Lydia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Paphlagonia, Pamphylia, the Pisidians, Cilicia, Syria, Phoenicia, Armenia, Persia, the Medes, and Parthiene [Parthia]” [quoted in Conzelmann, Hans*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 14].

It makes sense that Luke would have been using a traditional list because he knew that Macedonia and Achaia had been filled with Jews and that Paul eventually ministered to them. Does leaving them out of the list indicate that they were cut off from Jerusalem because of geography? Or, does leaving them out of the list indicate that Rome was so influential to these colonies that they were subsumed under his reference to Rome? Regardless of what we conclude, the list demonstrates an impressive number of Jewish pilgrims from a wide expanse of the world.

First, the list begins with the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. These are three populations which were present (in Roman times) in the area formerly controlled by the Persians (notice that Susa is pictured on the map as part of the Elamite kingdom, though it later became a Persian capitol and remember that Darius, the king in much of the Book of Daniel, was a Mede). The Parthians, of course, gave Rome considerable trouble in later decades and may be the models for the mounted archers in Revelation. These kingdoms would be identified with Iran on the contemporary map. Together with Mesopotamia, this would cover the eastern-most languages with which the crowd would be familiar [Lightfoot, p. 54].

Next, the list identifies the residents of Mesopotamia. This is to be identified with contemporary Iraq and it is the area that gave us the Assyrian and Babylonian (Chaldean) empires. It is also the geographical area where the best and brightest of the Israelite population was carried off into Exile (for some under Assyria and most under Babylon. Strangely, the list also places Judea here before jumping into a list of provinces in what is now Turkey (Turkiye). As a result, some have suggested that this could have originally been a reference to Armenia (on the east side of what is now Turkiye) that a scribe changed early on to Judea because he couldn’t imagine a list without Judea [Arrington, p. 22; Conzelmann, p. 14; Foakes-Jackson, F. J., *The Moffatt Commentary: Acts* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931), p. 12], though there is no Greek manuscript that we have found that doesn’t read “Judea.” Without manuscript evidence, we must assume that it is in the list to emphasize that the northern, Galilean, dialect was considered to be sufficiently different from the southern dialect that “Judeans” would have had trouble understanding the apostles [Du Veill, p. 40].

So, after the strange inclusion of Judea, we move to the list of provinces in Asia Minor, the area we know as Turkey (Turkiye) and that came to be the eventual capitol of the Roman Empire when Constantinople became the center of power. Cappadocia is a region of underground cities, unusual erosion, and headquarters of the so-called Cappadocian Fathers—early church leaders who emphasized the importance of the deity of Christ and the Trinity. Pontus is the area just south of the Black Sea and will be attested in the middle section of Acts [Bruce, F. F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 62]. It was ruled by chief aligned with Rome prior to Nero, but subjugated as an official province under Nero [Gloag, p. 79]. Asia is the area from Mysia in the northern part of modern Turkiye all the way down to the southern part of Caria. Ephesus was the main commercial and governing center of this area during Luke’s time and Paul spent at least three years in this area. Phrygia and Pamphylia are provinces associated with earlier kingdoms that were still prosperous in Roman times.

Egypt and Libya, of course, are in northern Africa. Egypt was important to the Jews from the 6th century B. C. forward, especially after the construction of Alexandria. Cretans are associated with Crete with many sites showing that there were Egyptian colonies there in earlier times. So, these are mentioned closer to the African geography than the Turkish/Syrian geography. Lastly, notice that the Romans are the only “western European” population mentioned. This may well be because Luke wanted to emphasize that, without Paul’s trip to Rome, evangelization of western Europe would likely have faltered [Bruce, p. 63].

Now, it is no wonder that those who were hearing the gospel presented in all of these languages were somewhat confused. If you’ve ever attended an international conference and listened to the “hubbub” of multiple languages discussing various matters prior to calling a session to order, you know that this can be quite disconcerting. But verse 7 gives us another reason why this is disconcerting; it is because those speaking (the apostles and possibly the other 108 or so believers) are considered to be Galileans. Not only might that suggest that they have a weird northern accent [Arrington, p. 24; Gloag, p. 76; Robertson, p. 23], but it also reflects that they were known as rabble-rousers [traitors], as well. We see this because “Galileans and Idumeans” were concerned the fiercest warriors during the revolt against Rome AD 66-70. Even if there were no supernatural element to the tongues (and, obviously, there was a divine origin), the general populace would have been amazed in the same way as if we had a slow-speaking professional athlete suddenly expound about quantum mechanics or a person with a Southern drawl suddenly explain a difficult calculus problem.

So, people are confronted with something that is beyond their experience. What do they do? They do the same thing people do in modern times. They try to explain it in human terms. “The inbreaking of the Holy Spirit is profoundly unsettling and deeply threatening to the crowd in the street, and so it must devise some explanation, some rationalization for such irrationality.” [Willimon, p. 30] They look for a natural cause. In this case (as in many cases), they mockingly suggest that the believers are drunk. J. B. Lightfoot called this mocking malicious and senseless, since a person would have to “shameless or stupid” to think that being drunk would enable someone to speak in a language they never knew before [Lightfoot, p. 56]. Now, it’s possible that they were just listening to the whole cacophony of conversations at once and thought it sounded like the slurred speech of drunken men, but what it really indicates is an unwillingness to hear—an unwillingness many Jews had toward Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and which Peter will address in his sermon. F. F. Bruce notes that the crowd may have been laughing off the testimonies of those filled with the Spirit, but he notes that Peter answers with a humorous riposte of it being too early [Bruce, p. 67].

Now, it’s interesting to me that Peter doesn’t say that it’s impossible for the men to be drunk. Rather, he suggests that it’s too early in the morning for all of them to be drunk. Only a few serious alcoholics would be in that condition that early in the morning, not a whole group of them. More importantly, the very accusation gives Peter a lead-in, transforming the accusation into an opportunity [Marshall, I. Howard, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 71. So he uses Joel 2:28-32 to account for the phenomenon the hearers were experiencing [Martin, p. 72], though he leads off the quotation with a phrase used by the Old Testament prophets to point to the Messianic Age [Arrington, p. 27; Tiede, p. 64]. He says it is the last, the final, the ultimate days. Then, he quotes from the Septuagint version of Joel, verses which are also quoted in Romans 10:13 and Revelation 6:12 [Marshall, p. 73].

Peter’s sermon is set up as a three-part framework.

#1 Challenge to Listeners: 2:14 (Listen to my explanation of what you’re experiencing);
 2:22 (Listen to facts about Jesus you can verify); and
 2:29 (Pay attention as I share about David to point to the New David).

#2 Christian Truth: 2:15-16 (We’re not drunk, but fulfilling Joel’s prophecy);
 2:22-24 (Jesus performed miracles, was killed, raised from the dead); and
 2:29-33 (Jesus has been exalted and poured out God’s Spirit).

#3 Appeal to the OT 2:17-21 (God will pour out His Spirit on sons and daughters);
 2:25-28 (The psalmist knew that focusing on God brings joy); and
 2:34-35 (David didn’t ascend, so Jesus is the true Messiah).
[Extrapolated from a note in Martin, p. 75.]

Before we consider the result, let me address something I find interesting. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus preaches His first sermon about the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of God’s promised kingdom in Luke 4. He receives a hostile response. In Acts, Peter preaches his first sermon about the Holy Spirit’s evidence and uses it to point to the saving acts of Jesus. The response bears some genuinely positive fruit and the church explodes numerically [Tiede, p. 63].

 Moving to Chapter 3

There is an interesting pattern in Acts 2:1-4:31. Something inexplicable occurs (the gift of languages in 2:5-13 and the healing of the lame man in 3:1-10) which creates confusion and curiosity, enabling Peter to preach about Jesus (2:14-36 and 3:11-26). The general populace responds in various ways in 2:37 and the religious rulers respond in 4:1-3. The people’s response gives Peter an opportunity to clarify (2:38-40) and the response of the rulers provokes an important debate (4:5-22) [Walaskay, Paul W. “Expository Article: Acts 3:1-10” in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 42:2* (April, 1988) (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1988), p. 171]. “The coming of the Holy Spirit which is mentioned twice (2:1-4 and 4:31) provides a literary bracket for this narrative, …” [Walaskay, p. 172].

So, the first thing I notice is that Peter and John are continuing to be involved with the Jewish faith. Some of us would have said that the Jewish faith was irrelevant, that we were in the post-Jewish era. They could have been just like modern church members who feel like church attendance, Bible Study, and prayer are optional. They give a little money here and there or show up every once in a while and feel like their obligation is taken care of. But Peter and John are heading up temple hill to participate in the third of three daily prayer times. “With the exception of healing in the name of Jesus, one searches Acts 1-5 in vain to find any practice or belief which was inconsistent with the basic concerns of first century Judaism or which could not be tolerated within the broad structures of Judaism.” [Blevins, p. 466]

The Jewish day began at 6 AM and the temple was open for prayer at the third hour (9 AM), sixth hour (12 noon), and ninth hour (3 PM). At the 6 AM and 3 PM times, the priests offered the “Tah- MEED,” a burnt offering, along with the burning of incense and prayers of benediction over the assembled people. This was where Peter and John were heading.

The second thing I notice is that there was a man who was lame from his mother’s womb. We’re talking about someone who was born deformed and never knew a normal life of running, playing, and wrestling as a child or young man, or even having a career goal like being a priest (like sacrifices, priests couldn’t have a flaw). Fortunately, like the crippled man in the early portion of Christ’s ministry, he seems to have had some friends. The text tells us that they were bringing him to one of the most famous gates at the temple.

I guess human nature is consistent throughout history. Wherever there is significant pedestrian traffic, there will be panhandlers, beggars, and con artists. Go to a major sporting or theatrical event and you’ll probably have to face at least one person seeking money. Walk down a metropolitan street and you’ll likely be hit up. One of my colleagues was walking with me down a street in Manchester, England and a guy asked him for money to fix his car. My colleague suddenly became hostile and I couldn’t understand why till I heard him say, “Sure you do. That’s why you were stationed one block over yesterday and took 5 pounds of my money.” And, there is a lady who stands beside the EL train at Adams and Wabash who constantly says, “Sir! Sir! Madame! Change? Change?” I gave her some change once, but not after I saw her in the 7-11 buying lottery tickets the next week. But regardless of how some people abuse other people’s generosity, it appears that this fellow was in dire need and it isn’t surprising that this fellow would place himself right in front of the gate that connected the Court of the Gentiles with the Court of the Women. He had a chance to take advantage of maximum compassion.

The gate was called Beautiful. We don’t know for sure, but we think it could have been the one described in Josephus [Bruce, p. 83]:

…there was one gate that was without the [inward court of the] holy house, which was
of Corinthian brass and greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver
and gold. …its height was fifty cubits [75’ high]; and its doors were forty cubits [60’
high]; and it was adorned after a most costly manner, as having much richer and
thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the other.
(Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book V, Chapter 5, Paragraph 3)

But all of this is just setting the scene. The action really starts when the lame man, over 40 years old according to Acts 4:22—not only a man according to the Jewish tradition but also of a symbolic age that suggests 4 (number of the created order) \* 10 (the number of sufficiency). So, his age symbolically means that he had reached the full potential of what he could do as a created being and, since he is so helpless that he has to be carried to the temple to panhandle, that doesn’t appear to be much.

The Greek text suggests that the men had just brought the man to the gate. He was just starting his business for the day. He knew what he needed. He needed cash. He must have been a familiar sight at the temple, just like those people on our streets in Chicago who don’t even put their cigarettes down while they shake their cups and rattle the change to get your attention. Like them, he didn’t want advice; he didn’t want sympathy; and he didn’t want prayer. He wanted cash.

Of course, that isn’t so different from us. God wants to meet our needs or more and we think we know what we need. We don’t want to be preached at; we don’t want sympathy; and sometimes, we don’t even want prayer. We just want what we want. And isn’t it frightening that there are many times when we settle for this or that when God wants to transform our lives dramatically? Sometimes, we rush to marriage when God has a soulmate for us. Sometimes, we settle for a crummy job when God has a mission for us. Sometimes, we settle for talking about God when God wants to infuse with power beyond our comprehension. Sometimes, we just want to give the minimum when God wants to bless us with the maximum. Do we really know what we need? This man didn’t.

Now, notice what Peter does. He tells the man to look at them. It isn’t just to look at him, but to look at both Peter and John. This is yet another way for Peter to signify that he is not working by himself. Here, he shows that John is also involved and later, he will explain about God’s power through the Holy Spirit [Du Veill, p. 76]. Also, sometimes when I don’t trust the street people and I just don’t want to be bothered with what I perceive to be a “con,” I make sure that I don’t make eye contact. But Peter demands eye contact. He takes the time and makes the effort to be involved. Now, I’m not asking you to get involved with street people. It’s much more vital that you get involved with the neighborhood, with the people around you at work and school.

Peter wasn’t afraid to ask the man to look at them because they weren’t afraid to get involved with the man. Peter also wasn’t afraid to have the man look at them because he knew that their lives, after the filling of the Holy Spirit, was a reflection of the Christ they served. And the question for us is, how much do we reflect Jesus? Are we accurate reflections of our Lord or are we funhouse mirrors?

Now, the text clearly tells us that the fellow was expecting Peter to not only “show him the money” but to hand it over. “Here, a crippled man asks for alms but the community which holds all things in common has little silver or gold to offer him. Temporary modest financial gain and charitable handouts are not primarily what this community is about.” [Willimon, p. 44; also mentioned in Marshall, p. 88] The church is concerned about one’s entire present and future life, a lifestyle with God—not a quick fix. Instead, Peter boldly informs him that he isn’t part of charitable foundation. His ability to help doesn’t come from financial strength. In fact, his ability to help doesn’t come from his OWN STRENGTH. He speaks with Jesus’ power of attorney. He speaks with the power to write a check on the Bank of Heaven.

Peter informs the man that he doesn’t have any silver or gold, but promises that he has something to give him. IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FROM NAZARETH, by the authority of Jesus, the historical figure, Christ, the pre-existent God who came to earth as the incarnate Son of God, from a city that normally had a bad reputation, the man is ordered to walk. Now, I know that both the King James Version and the chorus many of us sang as kids use “Rise up and walk!” [“Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee; In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, “Rise up and walk!’ I’m walking and leaping and praising God. I’m walking and leaping and praising God. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, “Rise up and walk!” Some Greek texts use that wording and it makes good sense. If you’re going to walk, you can’t do it lying or sitting down. Now, the OLDEST Greek texts don’t have that wording. I think the emphasis in those texts was on doing the seeming impossible, walking, and having Peter extend his hand to help him up as equivalent to the “rising.”

Taken together, both readings are insightful. As “Rise up and walk,” we see the truth that believers are expected to take some initiative themselves as they act in faith. They don’t just sit on their bottoms and wait for God to act. As the simpler “Walk,” we see the emphasis on God’s people helping people start the process and then, allowing God to finish it. As one commentator observed, “But the beggar does not budge. He knows that he cannot walk.” [Robertson, p. 42] Peter helps him up, but God heals him and sets him walking.

Notice also that the ankles and the bones didn’t strengthen until the person acted in faith. To be sure, he acted along with Peter, but the miracle takes place after the initial act of faith. So, whose power caused the miracle? Was it the man’s power? No, he simply responded to God’s word as spoken by Peter by acting in faith. Was it Peter’s power? Nope! Peter himself says in verse 12, “Men of Israel, why are you so amazed on account of this? Why do you keep staring at us just as though the power belonged to us [and consequently], we caused him to walk?” The power came from God—power flows through the believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I do think we need to recognize, though, especially since we’ve looked at both Acts 2 and 3, that Peter could have said, “Hey! Look at me! I’m full of Holy Ghost power! Look at me! God gave me the ability to do miracles.” Instead, “The logic of Peter’s sermon [in Chapter 2] is that the apostles’ ability to speak other languages is evidence that the Spirit has been poured out, and this is in turn evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. In other words, Peter’s Pentecost speech is actually about the messianic status of Jesus.” [Campbell, Constantine R. and Pennington, Jonathan, T., *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2020), p. 159]. Again, in Chapter 3, he could have said, “Look how God is using me as a healer!” Instead, “Peter called the crowd to repentance by once again connecting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the promises of God in Scripture (3:17-23, 26; cf. Deut. 18:15-19). Even their repentance fulfilled promises (3:24-15; cf. Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).” [Campbell and Pennington, p. 160].

And what do we have to do? We have to make sure our lives are aligned with God so that He can use us as His vessels whenever there is a need. But we don’t really expect God to work through us. We keep trying to reduce God to OUR expectations. Peter echoes the words of our Savior Himself when he commands the man to walk. It’s so like Jesus. What of us? Are we so like Jesus?

And finally, I can’t close without speaking of the reaction. The healed man was walking and leaping and praising God. If we saw someone do that in our church, we’d either be patronizing—smiling and saying, “That’s nice. He’ll outgrow this juvenile enthusiasm.”—or we’d be like the Jews who get upset in Chapter 4 and want to know how anybody would DARE expect God to do anything. I’m afraid that if I had been Peter and John in the temple precinct, knowing what had already happened to Jesus, I would have been saying, “Calm down! Don’t draw attention to yourself!” But people of faith can’t act out of either fear or embarrassment. When God is working in our church, it will be hard to keep quiet about it.

Finally, there is an interesting account about Thomas Aquinas visiting Pope Clement IV in the 13th century. The great theologian and philosopher came upon the pope auditing some of the Vatican’s treasure. The pope stated, “No more must the church say with Peter that of silver and gold we have none.” To which Aquinas replied, “Yes, but also the church can no longer say to the lame man, ‘Rise, stand up, and walk.” The POWER comes from God and if we start to depend on anything other than God, we are bound to fail.

As for Peter’s sermon, I’d like to use a paraphrase from a brilliant Greek scholar where he tried to summarize Peter’s sermon. The quotation is in italics at the end of this summary.

*Therefore repent and turn back (to God), so that your sins may be obliterated, and so that a period of recovery (i.e., a new age of godliness) may come from the presence of the Lord (God), and so that he may send (back) the one who was long ago designated to be your Messiah, namely Jesus. He must be received in heaven (i.e., must remain removed from mortal sight) until the time, spoken of by God through his holy prophets ever since the earliest days, when everything is to be restored to its proper position (i.e., when there is going to be a general reduction of the world’s dislocation and chaos.*[Moule, C. F. D., “The Christology of Acts” in Keck, Leander and Martyn, J. Louis, *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 168.]