

Acts 3:1-16

'It is no secret what God can do'

I love the words of the old country gospel song, *It is no secret what God can do!* For those of us of a certain vintage, that was a Jim Reeves and George Bev Shea classic. It was penned by an American movie star by the name of Stuart Hamblin - in fact, he was that good, he has a star embedded in the footpath on Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

Hamblin became a follower of Jesus at a Billy Graham crusade in LA in 1949. Shortly after coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, he and his wife were out for a meal with the cowboy actor, Mr John Wayne ... Hamblin shared his amazing story of how God reached down and rescued him - in the course of their conversation, he happened to say, 'hey, it's no secret what God can do.' That triggered off an idea in John Wayne's mind ... before the night was out, it was he who suggested that Stuart Hamblin pen a song based on the words, 'It is no secret what God can do!' Well, he did. The clock in the corner of his lounge was still chiming at midnight when he put pen to paper. It took him 17 minutes to do it. And the rest is history!

That's a powerful one-line summary of these verses in Acts 3. For you and I to fully appreciate 'the uniqueness of the Messiah'

- which is the title of your series of studies - we need to see what he did in verses 1-10. Why do I say that? Well, it was immediately after this awesome display of God's power in the life of a crippled beggar who was not simply broke, but broken, that we read in verse 11:

'While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.' This was a cloister, named after David's son, that was formed by a double row of marble columns, it had a cedar roof to it, and it ran all the way along the eastern wall of the temple's outer court - Jesus often walked there; we know from John 10:23, that he taught there as well.

Yes, it was the transformation in this man's life that started the ball rolling ... there were vast crowds gathered and that's what gave the Pentecostal preacher Peter the impetus he needed to tell them a few home truths. In a sense, the miracle was a warm-up act, a kind of crowd puller - there's no doubt that it was a real game changer.

To begin with, Peter posed two hugely important questions to the assembled, inquisitive, starry-eyed audience in verse 12: Number one, *'Why does this surprise*

you?’ And number two, ‘Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?’

I mean, you can see what Peter’s doing. He goes for the jugular, he takes no prisoners. He pulls no punches and leaves them in no doubt at the outset that he and John were just instruments whom God used ...

this hurting guy who was in his 40s (we know that from Acts 4:22), who had never walked in his life, who was severely handicapped from birth, who was totally dependent on other people, whose quality of life was pretty much non-existent, he was healed instantly because God did for him what no one else could do ...

yes, as Peter is the first to point out, there’s power in the name of Jesus! Peter and John were not supermen or heroes or anything else ... the credit belongs to Jesus alone! To me, this is also significant because in the previous chapter we read that 3,000 people were saved, but here there’s only one who is touched and transformed ... the lesson is, those who reach the many in the big crowd, ought to care about reaching the one who is lost and needy. People need the Lord.

There’s a touch of irony in the story and its setting - this anonymous beggar who has been dealt a bad hand in life is sitting there at the gate Beautiful - sometimes known as the Gate Nicanor ... he’s going nowhere and

he’s doing nothing. Life for him was a series of negatives! So very sad ...

The historian Josephus tells us that this gate was on the eastern side of the temple complex. It separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Women; it was about 75 feet high and 60 feet wide; it was generously overlaid with Corinthian bronze. It was recognised as ‘a work of art’ and was admired by all and sundry. In fact, it was so ornate and large that it took 20 men to close it.

I love the way Dr Luke describes it here in verse 8, when he says that after the miracle, *‘[The man] jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with [Peter and John] into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.’*

I tell you, that is nothing short of amazing, it is sensational. He’s walking on his own two feet - no one had to teach him how to do it, he just did it. How long does it take for a child to learn how to walk and run and jump? This man did it right away. Talk about elation and sheer joy, this is it. Celebration. Even Charles Wesley got in on the act in his great hymn, *O for a thousand tongues to sing ... we have that one line, ‘and leap ye lame for joy.’* Ah, my friend, it is no secret what God can do!

It’s summed up so eloquently in verse 16, where we read: *‘By faith in the name of*

Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.'

Therein lies the uniqueness of the Messiah - here is one who saves, who heals, who does miracles ... one who leaves men and women gasping with astonishment, and a sense of incredulity and wonderment. The reality is, these folks can't explain it, neither can they explain it away! You see, it's a God-thing! A reminder that the Messiah is unique!

He was unique in eternity past - unique in his birth when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit - unique in his perfect life down here on earth - unique in his atoning death for sinners on Calvary's cross - unique in his resurrection on the third day - unique in his ascension forty days later - unique in his present ministry at the Father's right hand - unique in that he is coming back again - and from then, when time is no more, he will be forever unique in an eternity yet to come.

In one way or another, many of these grand and glorious truths are hinted at in these few verses in Acts 3 ... if you like, they are an A-Z of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. I think Peter's opening statement in verse 13 says it all in a nutshell - it's a declaration and an affirmation that the faithful God of the covenant - the God of the patriarchs:

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 'has glorified his servant Jesus.' So, he's the God of eternity, but he's also the God of history. And he tells us here that Jesus is not only the Son of God, he's also seen as the Servant of God, the Suffering Servant we read of in Isaiah. Peter recognises the fact in his sermon that the people and the nation have done all kinds of bad things to the Lord Jesus - but God is God, he is sovereign, and he has the final say in it all ...

when man did his worst to Jesus, God did his best. Jesus was rejected and despised by sinful man, but he was vindicated by a holy and righteous God. He exalted Jesus far above all. Now he sits enthroned on high, crowned with a royal diadem, and clothed with glory and honour. God's beloved Son is eternally worshipped and adored.

From hanging on a centre cross of shame and ridicule, where man abused him, to the highest place that heaven affords, where he is the centre of attraction and attention.

From the depths of inky black darkness to the lofty peaks of grandeur and glory, such was the journey of Jesus.

There's the uniqueness of the Messiah. And that's what the old preacher is emphasising right here in Acts 3 ... in a sermon that's all about Jesus. It's worth noting that in his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost and again in this one a few days later that Peter

has one string to his bow ... his sermon is focused on Jesus Christ ... centred on him!

There's a need for us to get our eyes off man and put them on Jesus, and especially when God is working among us. It seems to me, that's something for those of us who are preachers to keep in the front of our minds - we need to make much of Jesus. It's not about me or you, it's all about him!

Peter, brave man that he is, pulls the rug out from under their feet when he tells them that they were, in one sense, responsible for the brutal death of the Lord Jesus.

We read in verse 13 that they *'handed him over to be killed, and [they] disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.'*

At the end of the day, it's a balancing act; it's an incredibly fine line between the will of man and the sovereign purpose of God. Peter doesn't get bogged down in the detail of it all, nor does he go off on a tangent with the theology of it all - he just states the indisputable fact and leaves them to think whatever they want to think!

He raised the stakes higher in verse 14 when he told them that they blew it big time when they flatly *'disowned'* Jesus as the *'holy and righteous one'* and, instead, they showed favour to a murderer called Barabbas. His name means, 'son of father' -

an interesting contrast to Jesus, who was the 'Son of the Father.'

I mean, Peter's indictment of them was devastatingly direct ... he did not miss them and hit the wall.

Jesus is spoken of as 'the holy one' - he is not only holy by nature, but he is also one who is separated to God to do his will. That was his all-consuming passion and delight. 'Holy one' is also a messianic title ascribed to Jesus - we know that from Psalm 16:10. I'm intrigued with the fact that even the demons knew the truth that Jesus was the Holy One - we see that in Luke 4:34.

These folk, back there and then, were quite happy to see Jesus sent to the gallows and quite content to have a ruthless criminal released - such was the sad and sorry state of their sinful hearts and minds when they demanded the condemnation of one who was innocent and the acquittal of the guilty. Luke shows us in verse 15 that God always has the last word ... sure, on Good Friday, they killed Jesus, the one who is the *'author of life'* - that is, he is the pioneer of life, the originator of life, the source of life, and the fountain of life. Three days later on Easter Sunday morning, *'God raised him from the dead.'*

The same word for 'author' is used a couple of times in Hebrews - he is spoken of in 2:10 as the *'author of salvation'* and in 12:2 as

the 'author of faith.' A reminder of the deity of the Lord Jesus.

When we join all the dots, what do we discover? A triumphant gospel message - that's all focused on a God who raised the dead, a God of stupendous power, and he's the same one who changes people today from the inside out. That has to be one of the most amazing 'but God' hinges in the entire Bible.

You did this to Jesus, but God did that to Jesus! He rolled the stone away. When he is on the move, he is unstoppable. No man can outdo God; no man can outwit God; no man can outshine the living God. He stands alone, he's a one-off, he is unique.

The incisive comment in verse 16 is a potent reminder that when God does something, he doesn't do it in half measures. If God does it, he does it well.

Peter acknowledges that the man's healing was 'complete' - brilliant, there was nothing gradual about it, it was 100 percent, it was a total healing. And well he knew it. He didn't have to go to his medical advisers a few months later for a check up - no, when God did it, it was job done. Full stop.

A reminder, one more time, that 'it is no secret what God can do ...' and ... 'what he's done for others, he can do for you!'

And the story continues on into chapter 4 when Peter and John are hauled before the

Sanhedrin who don't like what they see and hear! The authorities are worried when they see the forward march of the church of Jesus Christ ... as before, Peter speaks up and he speaks out about the person and work and name of Jesus Christ - he's not in the least bit ashamed or embarrassed ... his God means everything to him - the one who is glorified, exalted, and raised up.

In closing, let me draw attention to the healing of the lame man - you see, it gives us a useful checklist for evaluating similar circumstances today:

One, when God heals it is immediate - there is no delay. Instant. **Two**, when God heals, it is supernatural - it is something that can't always be explained by medical science.

Three, when God heals, it is perfect - the man had no more pain, no more problems.

Four, when God heals, it is according to his will - God singled this one man out for special attention. **Five**, when God heals, it does not depend on a person's faith - Jesus healed this man in spite of his lack of faith.

Six, when God heals, it always brings glory to Jesus - Peter never once took the credit for doing anything of this nature. And, **seven**, when God heals, it is for a distinct purpose - God had other ideas up his sleeve and this person's healing was a means to an end - we see that in Acts 4.

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