

WHY ARE YOU AMAZED AT THIS?**Acts 3**

Intro: Every year, when my birthday comes, I try to acknowledge the Facebook birthday greetings that flow in early and often. But, inevitably, as the torrent grows in intensity, I get overwhelmed and I can't respond to each one individually. It's crazy to even think I can, so I don't know why it bothers me. But it does.

This year I resolved that I was going to acknowledge every single birthday greeting without fail. Sometimes I just gave a thumbs up signifying "Thank you!", but I soon realized that seemed cheap and lazy. So for almost everyone, replied with at least "Thanks!" and for brothers and sisters and cousins and ABCers and dear old friends, I added a little bit more. But there was only so much time on Thursday, and I didn't have the day off, so I had to be careful and strategic. In the end, I think that I actually acknowledged every single one – but I'm not 100% certain of that.

One of those greetings that really amazed me, and made me very grateful, was from Ruth Pawelski. Some of you know Ruth. She is a beloved leader and fixture in this conference and she's been my friend for many years. So, it's not surprising that I would get a greeting from her, until you realize that her health has been very fragile and tenuous over the past year. She is in her '90s, and there were times when it looked like Ruth would not be among us for much longer. So it was a blessing for me that she took the time on my birthday to wish me Happy Birthday and ask for God's blessing on me.

Why should I have been surprised? Of course Ruth would do that! But it also made me think about one of the sweetest and romantic stories I've ever heard. I know I've shared it with you but yesterday was Valentine's Day so I'll do it again here because it works. It's a story of amazement. And it pertains to the first date that Ruth had with her husband, John. John had been gazing longingly at Ruth from afar for quite some time, and finally he worked up the nerve ask her out on a date. So he went up to her at church, and he shyly asked her if she would honor him by accompanying him to a hymn sing later that day at a neighboring church. Her answer was an immediate, "Yes!"

This blew him away, and he replied, with joyful surprise "You will?!" And the rest is history. They eventually got married and have been married now nearly seventy years. And they weren't just married, they have been happily married. Which is good because they have been in Christian Ministry together in the USA, Cuba and Mexico and for past many decades have served faithfully at our Dayton Mission here in Ohio.

But why was John surprised? Well, for him it was a dream come true and, knowing John, it was also a prayer answered. John is an extraordinary man of prayer and so his sincere prayer was for a partner for life, and the Lord provided her, just like that. All John had to do was ask. He had faith in God, but he was still surprised. It was a joyful surprise, but he was still amazed.

We will see in our text for today in Acts 3 that everyone was amazed at the healing power of the name of Jesus, and my question is why? Why are we amazed when God works his wonders? Let's look at that a bit.

We will read this in two portions and they will not be on the screen. And, by the way, after today, this series from Acts will be on hiatus until after Easter since we will be embarking on a Lenten series entitled GIVING IT UP next Sunday on the first Sunday of Lent.

Now, a tiny bit of review . . .

Jerusalem was in awe

- Toward the end of our text from last week, we read, *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* Acts 2:43. What was happening in this growing group of people who were following the way of Jesus, was simply awe-inspiring. And the word was spreading about it. The new believers were in wonder at the greatness of the work of the Holy Spirit. But it's also very obvious that the people of Jerusalem were witnessing this as well. They weren't as close to the situation, so they didn't understand. They just knew amazing things were being reported.
- People who are not familiar with the power of God, call his work miraculous. Believers, while still in awe, are much more aware of what God can do, so they don't necessarily see it as miraculous, because they know the power of God at work when they see it.

- If you want to talk about miraculous, look at the fact that Peter and John were no longer competitors for the attention of Jesus, and now were partners in the ministry of the Good News. Now let's look at the first 10 verses of Acts 3.

(Read Acts 3:1-10)

What Peter and John had, they gave generously

- Notice how the two apostles, were going to the temple for prayer at 3:00. PM. This is solid evidence that they remained faithful to the teaching of Judaism. They didn't abandon their faith. If anything, they were more involved in it. They also knew that there were great opportunities for sharing the Good News. So here they are, walking into the temple courts at the time of the afternoon prayers.
- As they enter through the gate, a crippled man, incapable of anything other than lying on a mat, was there, pointing to a spot on his blanket where people, he hoped, would throw coins. It was his only income because begging was the only thing that he could do. Beggars can make a good living, especially ones that actually had something that was wrong. This man had never been able to walk or work. It says in verse 2 that he was *lame from birth*. This was obvious. His legs were atrophied, and his feet and toes were turned in every which direction. So he looked to Peter and John as they walked past him, and he knew they were a good mark – they looked like good men and, no doubt, they would have compassion and throw him a couple of coins. He was expectantly waiting.
- But Peter and John were expectant in their own way because they were always alert for some way to minister. Their response was, and you know it from the text I just read, so I'll paraphrase it, **“We don't have any money, but we have something even greater than that. Get up and walk.”** And the man got up and walked.
- Let me ask, quickly? What's different? What's different over the past 2,000 years that we don't walk with the same kind of expectancy? Would it be different, if we were so sure of the power of the Holy Spirit that God's healing would happen as we invoked his Son's name? F. B. Meyer says this as he comments on Peter and John's actions *"Let us move among men as to lead them to expect that we have something to give, and then give them Jesus."* I've been frustrated that I've not had this kind of healing faith. Why could I not say “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, be healed!” to Gail or Keith or Ron or Bizzie or Dean, AND HAVE THEM BE HEALED? I've felt pretty helpless. I console myself with the fact that, in each case they are healed. They have the best healing of all – they are enjoying Paradise. But I wish, just once, we could have someone leap up and dance around in the joy of physical healing. To borrow a song about heaven, oh what a day of rejoicing that will be! I also console myself with the fact that I can do what Meyer and move among lost men and women and girls and boys and lead them to expect that I have something to give, and then give them Jesus. It's difficult to think there is a better gift than that.
- Now back to Peter and John: Notice that they took no credit for themselves. Peter's exact words were, *"In The name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"* Acts 3:6b. Well now, lest you think that I would not be amazed at this, let me correct you. I would be amazed. I would be in awe. What God does is awesome. I am no different from the psalmist who sang, *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?* Psalm 8:3-4 ESV. We can't help it. God is that way . . .

But why are we amazed?

- Everyone there in those Temple courts recognized the lame man who was no longer lame. They knew that he was the one that sat by the beautiful gate begging for money, and here it says *They were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him.* Acts 3:10b.

- Peter and John had learned that you didn't miss an opportunity like this, so they started preaching. Listen **(Read Acts 3:11-26)**

- The first thing the apostles asked was . . .

Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this?

- And they began preaching. Peter, was primed and ready. He had experience with this. His message was right at the tip of his tongue, and he opens with “Why do you stare at us as though it was us or our holiness or our power that did this. It was God! And then he gets specific, he points at them and tells them “ Your

God, *The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.* Acts 3:13-16. Peter is preaching again – just like on the Day of Pentecost. He's pointing the finger again and says “Look you folks are the ones that killed him. You're the ones that killed the author of life. But God raised him from the dead for a purpose and we are his witnesses. And it's his name that healed this man. There's power in the name of Jesus.

- Peter is very much to the point: “You can be amazed, but the God who raised the dead, can heal this man. This man who is in perfect health right in front of you. And then he Peter assures them – You can be forgiven for your ignorance. And here is a plan, here is how you can redeem yourself – Repent! There it is again! Turn away from your sins, and they will be blotted out. Now, that's a miracle. This is what is amazing, the burden of sin can be blotted out. But only Jesus of Nazareth can do that. Only the forgiveness of God can do that.
- Be amazed at the healing of a lifelong lame man – be amazed that a lifelong sinner can repent and be healed of sin. Why are we amazed? Well, it's because it's utterly amazing and TRUE! Amen.