

“IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH”

Acts 3:1–10

Key Verse: 3:6

“But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’”

Are you confident about anything? We all know people who are self-confident. Sometimes, such an attitude is hard to bear. But so is a person who’s always unsure, calculating, or negative. In today’s passage we see another episode with Peter. A few months earlier, despite his promise to go with Jesus to prison and death (Luke 22:33), Peter denied him three times (22:54–62). He was even ready to take the others back to their old lives as fishermen (John 21:2–3). But now, Peter has become a real spiritual leader, the key figure in the birth of the church. What happened? The Holy Spirit came. As Jesus promised, when the Holy Spirit came on him, Peter received power to be Jesus’ witness (1:8). In this encounter with a man lame from birth, we can learn what it means to be a witness of Jesus today. May God speak to us personally through his word.

In chapter 2, at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on the 120 followers of Jesus, and in the boldness of the Holy Spirit, Peter gave his first sermon. Based on Scripture, Peter clearly proclaimed Jesus as both Lord and Christ, rebuked the people who crucified him, and challenged them to repent. When 3,000 of them did, the early church was born. It was none other than the mighty power of God at work. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. In the Holy Spirit they began to have a God-fearing, unselfish, loving fellowship. Observers liked this new church, and new people continued to join. But being witnesses of Jesus was more than enjoying fellowship with each other.

In this next section of Acts, chapters 3–5, the author shows us how God establishes Peter and the apostles as the true spiritual leaders for his church, replacing the old leaders of Israel. The old leaders relied on their traditions, wealth, power, and threats. But these new leaders of the early church rely on the Holy Spirit and imitate Jesus. In these chapters we also will see how the apostles increasingly get persecuted, including being arrested (4:3), and later, put in public prison (5:18). Finally, the old leaders furiously want to kill them (5:33) and give them a beating (5:40). Still, the apostles continue to be filled with the Spirit (4:31), preach the gospel in the temple (3:12–16; 5:20,25) and win so many people over to Jesus (4:4; 5:14). They also do great miracles just as Jesus did (3:8; 5:15–16) and enjoy the people’s favor (4:21; 5:26). All of this is sparked by

one event, the one in this passage.¹ This passage highlights an important teaching in Acts: faith in the name of Jesus.² It especially shows us, in six practical ways, the central theme of Acts: what it means to be Jesus' witnesses (1:8).

First, witnesses of Jesus pray. Look at verse 1 (ESV). "The hour of prayer" mentioned here is 3:00 PM. Devout Jews prayed three times a day, at sunrise, at 3:00 PM, and at sunset. But when Jesus was on earth, his disciples didn't really pray. Right before his arrest, while he was struggling so hard in prayer, they were sleeping (Mark 14:37–41). But now, prayer has become their daily habit; they pray before doing anything.³ Through prayer they continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit and boldness (4:31). Instead of getting entangled in problems, they resolve to devote themselves to prayer (6:4). In Acts, Luke highlights how crucial prayer is. To be Jesus' witnesses today, we've got to learn how to pray.

Second, witnesses of Jesus cowork in love. Look at verse 1 again. It's the first time the author mentions Peter and John together.⁴ Throughout Acts, John doesn't say anything. So, why is he mentioned? The Bible highlights how we need at least two witnesses to establish the truth of anything.⁵ But Peter and John together also shows how the Holy Spirit changes people. During Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter and John had been intense rivals. Twice among the disciples there were arguments about who was the greatest.⁶ Once, John came with his brother James, along with their ambitious mother, and asked Jesus to even push Peter out and make the two of them his top men (Matt.20:20–21). After Jesus was killed, Peter and John were still competing about who could run the fastest to his tomb (John 20:3–4). And when they met the Risen Jesus, Peter was still comparing himself with John (John 21:20–22). But in his Gospel, John recorded how Jesus, in his great love and grace, restored Peter to be a real shepherd of his sheep (John 21:15–17). John fully supported Peter as the spiritual leader for God's people. In this new Christian church they relied on each other and supported each other. Their coworking in genuine love was a vital part of their powerful witness about Jesus. Without love, we may try to say or do impressive things, but end up seeming just loud or obnoxious. But when even two coworkers truly love each other, people come to believe.⁷

¹ See Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.179–182.

² 2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:7,10,12,17–18,30; 5:28,40–41; 8:12,16; 9:14–16,21,27–28; 10:43,48; 15:26; 16:18; 18:15; 19:5,13,17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9.

³ 1:14,24; 2:42.

⁴ 3:1,3–4,11; 4:13,19; 8:14.

⁵ Cf. Deut.17:6; 19:15; Matt.18:16; 2 Cor.13:1; 1 Tim.5:19; Heb.10:28.

⁶ Luke 9:46; 22:24.

⁷ John 13:35; 17:21.

Third, witnesses of Jesus see others as Jesus did. Look at verse 2. In the city of Jerusalem, getting up to the temple area from any direction always involved climbing up steps. This man lame from birth couldn't do that. In fact, he couldn't do anything except beg. To many people he looked like a burden, a nuisance, someone who didn't really matter. Having to be carried by others daily and to beg daily, treated like an object of pity daily, was not a beautiful life. But they placed this man, born into such a life, at the Beautiful Gate where most people liked to enter the temple area. At this point in his life it was a tragic irony: sitting at the Beautiful Gate in a life of misery. Look at verse 3. Seeing Peter and John, this man reached out his hands to ask for "alms," meaning money. While asking, it seems it was his habit to turn his face away in shame, as most beggars did. It was common in ancient times to make fun of such people, or to be cruel to them. Those who threw money at them often did it without even looking at them, giving only out of their own vanity.

But something very different is about to happen. Look at verse 4. Though nobody really took a close look at this man, Peter and John did. They had learned from being with Jesus how he always treated people. As they fixed their gaze on him, they didn't see him as tragic, or as an object of pity. They saw him as a human being just like them. So they were willing to stop and look, not to intimidate or embarrass him, or to say something superficial, but to truly help him. Witnesses of Jesus are different. They look beyond people's present problems and appearances and treat them with the respect and dignity that every human being deserves. Many people today still feel unseen, for many reasons. It may be because they don't seem impressive, or don't have connections, or because of their race or gender or weaknesses. But Jesus sees each person, whatever their appearance, like he or she is the most important person in the world, and worth his time. To be his witness means to see each person as Jesus does.

Look at verse 5. The man's situation has made him spiritually sick, so sick that all he can do is expect people to help him and give him something. He's so sick he just wants to receive, without even looking at people. It's why the first thing Peter and John do is insist to him, "Look at us" (4). Their words sound harsh, but they speak them in love, to begin real restoration in this man's soul. "Look at us." They want to set this man free from shame. "Look at us." They want to set him free from a life of only trying to get something from people, a life of using people. "Look at us." They want this man to know the beauty of looking people in the eye with love and having real relationships. This man has so many compound problems: a life-long ailment, poverty, shame, feeling worthless, and no healthy relationships. With spiritual insight Peter and John can see it all. And it looks hopeless.

Fourth, witnesses of Jesus totally depend on him. Look at verse 6. Peter begins, “I have no silver and gold...” Peter has dedicated his entire life to following Jesus, learning from him, helping him, and now, serving his flock. He has set an example of sacrificial living and sharing, and all the other believers have followed him in this. To human eyes, Peter has no possessions or accomplishments, nothing to boast about. But through all the years of training he has learned how to depend on Jesus, which has made him spiritually rich. He has learned firsthand how God works mightily, not through human resources or ability but when we simply depend on Jesus. Peter believes that even in the hopeless situation of this man, lame from birth and sick with begging, Jesus our Risen and Living Lord can give new life and complete healing. Our human tendency is to live based on what looks possible, and to depend on ourselves or others. But witnesses of Jesus are those who have learned to totally depend on him.

Fifth, witnesses of Jesus believe the power of his name. Let’s read verse 6. Here Peter introduces the source of his spiritual confidence. It’s no longer himself. It’s not even in his past training and experience. It’s only in the name of the living Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus came from a humble place and served all kinds of sinners, then was rejected and crucified. But God raised him from the dead, exalted him to his own right hand as his only Son, and made him both Lord and Christ. He’s the one who’s been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt.28:19). He’s the one still reigning over all things and all people. He’s the only one through whom we can do all things (Phil.4:13).

Peter especially believes in the power of Jesus’ name. It’s not a name we use like magic (19:13–17). The Bible tells us the name of Jesus is above every name.⁸ We call on his name⁹ and are baptized in his name (Acts 2:38). Our sins are forgiven “for his name’s sake” (1 John 2:12). We are washed, sanctified and justified in his name (1 Cor.6:11). If we believe, we “have life in his name” (John 20:31). Jesus taught us to pray in his name¹⁰ and said we are protected by his name (John 17:11–12). Through his name we have access in one Spirit to the Father and have boldness and confidence.¹¹ We gather together in his name,¹² receive children in his name, we even conquer demons in his name.¹³ All our speaking and serving are to be done “in his name,” meaning “for his sake” (Col.3:17). Sometimes, we’re insulted and suffer for his name.¹⁴ We endure patiently and bear up for his name’s sake (Rev.2:3). As we live in this world

⁸ Cf. Eph.1:21; Phil.2:9–10.

⁹ 2:21; 9:14,21; 22:16.

¹⁰ Cf. John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23.

¹¹ Cf. Eph.2:18; 3:12.

¹² Cf. Matt.18:20; 1 Cor.5:4.

¹³ Cf. Luke 9:48; 10:17.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Pet.4:14,16.

where Satan dwells, we hold fast to the name of Jesus and do not deny his name.¹⁵ We're even ready to give our lives for his name (Acts 21:13).

But in this passage Peter does something specific with his name. Read verse 6 again. This demonstrates that the name of Jesus has power to heal people both physically and spiritually, even of incurable diseases.¹⁶ We just need faith in his name. When we call on the name of Jesus, we are inviting his presence to be with us. And when we give people the name of Jesus, we have faith that it is not us, but our Risen Lord Jesus Christ who heals them (9:34). Witnesses of Jesus are those who, by faith, give people the name of Jesus so that they can really be healed.

Sixth, witnesses of Jesus personally help others. Look at verse 7. Peter not only gave the lame man the name of Jesus; he also personally took him by the right hand and raised him up. It shows that Peter had resurrection faith in Jesus. It also shows his compassion and personal help for this powerless, helpless man. Through Peter's faith, compassion and personal help, this man's feet and ankles, so weak after never being used, were made strong. Witnesses of Jesus still reach out to give a helping hand to people who just can't get up on their own.

What happens? Read verse 8. This man can't believe it. He can leap up and begin to walk. And he doesn't run away to enjoy his new life. Instead, he enters the temple with Peter and John. And what's he doing in the temple? Quietly worshipping? No! It says he's walking, and leaping, and praising God. He's so wholehearted. He's drawing everybody's attention. It's the most beautiful sight that all began at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. This man's heart-moving praise really blesses everybody there (9–10). It seems to be a glimpse of what all those who've been healed by Jesus will be doing in heaven.

In today's event we learn what witnesses of Jesus do. Witnesses of Jesus pray. Witnesses of Jesus cowork in love. Witnesses of Jesus see others as Jesus did. Witnesses of Jesus totally depend on him. Witnesses of Jesus believe the power of his name. Witnesses of Jesus personally help others. Read verse 6 again. May God help each of us experience healing of whatever is holding us back and make us living witnesses of Jesus who glorify his name.

¹⁵ Cf. Rev.2:13; 3:8.

¹⁶ 3:16; 4:10,30.