



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG45: Growing The Church (3/6) *Growth In The Community*

Acts 3:1-26

Home Group Study Notes

27th February 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

In this study we're thinking about how the Good News of Jesus began to grow in the community. Share with your Home Group the first time you heard the good news of Jesus and how it made you feel at the time.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study Acts 3:1-26, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) What does Acts 3:1-26 tell us about the church's initial step to communicate with the wider community?

2) In contrast to life in Palestine in the first century, modern Britain has free healthcare, schooling, access to legal protection and many other benefits. What comparisons, if any, can be made between community outreach today and in New Testament times?

3) What obstacles prevent the church from reaching out today, locally, nationally and internationally, and how can these obstacles be overcome?

They have been responsible for killing the author of life. But what does God do now? He doesn't wipe them out. He offers to wipe away their sin. The slate is wiped completely clean. The virus is deleted without it even touching the recycle bin. He sends a preacher to tell them how to be saved.

Peter is drawing the people towards Jesus. They knew Him, many had probably seen Him when he came into Jerusalem, some were probably present for his crucifixion, and had heard about His resurrection. If this claim would be untrue, that Jesus had not been raised from the dead, it would have been easy to prove by producing His body, but they could not because they knew the tomb to be empty. Therefore, the apostles testimony was undeniable. Not only was there no body to produce, but Peter has the evidence of the miracle working power of God through the name of Jesus Christ, the lame man, who was standing with Peter and John. This must have shocked the crowd somewhat. To be told that the man who they did their best to get rid of was actually the promised Jewish Messiah. But to soften the blow of all this truth, Peter points out to them what they did, they did in ignorance.

Peter's sermon is one of many in Acts where we can learn how to present the gospel from the apostles themselves. In each of these speeches we can see the fundamental things that should always be there in a faithful presentation of the gospel which should include four key elements:

- It is the sharing of historical facts not just propositions and doctrines.
- The person of Jesus Christ is the focus, His: Life; Death; Resurrection; Ascension; and return.
- The kingdom of God-The message has personal as well as cosmic significance and requires submission to the person of Christ.
- An invitation is made that requires a response.

Conclusion: In proclaiming the gospel there is a fine balance between faithfully preaching the unchanging message of the New Testament and interpreting it afresh to today's generation. It is worth noting how Peter, along with Jesus and the apostle Paul for example, sensitively matched their messages with their audience to provide a bridge or point of contact to enable their hearers to more fully understand. Peter spoke to them in terms of the God of their ancestors: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus didn't deal with the woman of Samaria the same way he dealt with Zacchaeus; Peter; the rich young ruler; Nicodemus; or the Pharisees. Paul didn't speak to the Jews in the synagogues as he did with the Greek intellectuals in Athens: each message was tailored for its audience. Of course, this isn't the way we'd present the gospel to 21st century Brits with no Bible background at all, but remember Paul's declaration to the Corinthians: "*I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*"

And that's a model for us. We need to tell people the gospel – the news about what Jesus has already done: his life, death and resurrection and the implications of those events for us. But we also need to tell people about what Jesus is doing among us; they need to hear and see from our lives that he's a living, present, active Lord and Saviour. The healing of the lame man at the Temple gate offers us important lessons as the church grows out into the community. Furthermore, their actions challenge the status quo and that places the apostles themselves in danger – as we shall see when we look at ch4.

Prayer (by Michael Buckley)

Jesus, your coming on earth was like a new dawn over a world of darkness: the blind saw, the lame walked again, the sick were healed and even the dead were raised to life. Come again into the lives of everyone and heal the wounds of their broken hearts. Come again to all who are sick or depressed and fill their lives with hope and peace. Come again to us as we call on your holy name so that we too may receive your help and healing grace. **Amen.**

Others are keen to say, ‘Yes’ because to say anything else seems to dishonour the Lord and box him in. Some people say: ‘All the miracles in Acts were done by the apostles; and they were unique, because they were the eye-witnesses to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; so God enabled them to do miracles to underline the authority of what they said; but once they died out there was no further need for miracles, since their message had been authenticated once and for all.’ But the problem with that argument is that there are miracles recorded in the book of Acts done by non-apostles - e.g., by Stephen in chapter 6, and Philip in chapter 8. Another problem is 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, where the apostle Paul writes: *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit [i.e., some ministry or work enabled by the Holy Spirit] is given for the common good ... to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit to another miraculous powers [and so on]...* The point is: that’s a list of things that Paul expected to mark the church until the Lord Jesus comes again. There’s nothing in the context of 1 Corinthians to say that healings would only mark the first generation church. So I take it we should expect healings and therefore pray for them and exercise faith in Jesus for them. But we can’t say that God will heal everyone and every time.

However, there is no promise in the Bible that, if Christians pray and exercise faith in Jesus, God will always heal. God is sovereign, and for reasons we often don’t understand, he sometimes heals and sometimes allows an illness or disability to continue. It’s also a reminder that God’s response to our prayers is sometimes: Yes; not yet; wait; even no. But it also shows us something about the fact that God holds all things together in his sovereign will.

In 2 Timothy 4.20, we find Paul saying that he ‘*left Trophimus sick in Miletus*’. I assume they prayed and exercised faith that Jesus could heal him. In Galatians 4.13 we find Paul saying: ‘*As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.*’ And we know Paul had something he referred to as his ‘thorn in the flesh’. I assume he prayed and that others prayed for him and that they exercised faith in Jesus.

But God, as I suggested earlier, is sovereign over whether he heals and when. And if we don’t take that on board we end up with believers wrongly concluding that they weren’t healed, or a loved one wasn’t healed, because they didn’t have enough faith. And that’s a cruel and false conclusion that only adds more unhappiness to a situation of illness. But having said that, the New Testament does lead us to expect the Lord to bring healings. So we’re to be open to that and to ask for that, while recognising that he is sovereign, and that we don’t know what his plan is for any given situation.

The Healing: Used as an Opportunity to Preach Jesus, vs17-26: The disciples met daily in the Temple Courts. Yes, they were meeting for prayer but I think there is more to this than meets the eye. Why would they do this? It seems to me that they met regularly in the temple courts because this was an ideal place for evangelism. What was the one thing they wanted more than anything else? They wanted their fellow Jews to put their faith in the promised Messiah who had already come. They did not want to absent themselves from where the community met, but to be right amongst them and we see from this story that their strategy paid dividends.

Vs17-20. “*Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.*” Peter says that they have been involved in the death of the promised Jewish Messiah. What should we expect to read next? I think what Peter says is truly astounding. He says, vs19: “*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.*” Doesn’t this teach us something astonishing about the grace and mercy of God? These people have just been involved in the more wicked and horrendous murder in all of human history.

4) Churches can often be seen as a ‘holy huddle’ What are the pressing needs of our community – and how are you and us, as a church family, getting involved?

5) When the Lord Jesus does something remarkable among us, whether it’s a healing or another unexplained event, how can we use the occasion to point others to him?

6) Take the opportunity to pray for some of the mission organisations that we support: Church Mission Society (Paul and Jean Dobbie in Nepal); Just Care; Operation Christmas Child; Schools Ministry Billericay; Saint Luke’s Hospice; Samaritan’s Purse ...



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG45: Growing The Church (3/6) *Growth In The Community*

Acts 3:1-26

Home Group Sermon Notes

27th February 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: As we continue our series on 'Growing the Church' we're thinking about how God used a miracle to bring people into a saving faith in Jesus. The role of the church, as seen from the book of Acts and the Great Commission (Matthew 28) is to win the lost to salvation and teach all that Jesus commanded and it is this which resulted in the good news of Jesus growing in the community.

The Healing, vs1-11: Peter and John were on their way to the temple for prayer, vs1. Even though they were the first Christians – believing and trusting in Jesus as Messiah, and having witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection – they had not turned their backs on being Jewish; far from it! They were the first 'fulfilled' or 'Messianic' Jews. They did not, as we saw a few weeks ago, see a conflict between prayers in the temple and prayers in the home. They prayed at 9 am; noon; and 3pm. The last, the evening prayer, was when the largest crowds would have gathered at the Temple. It was on one of these regular trips to the temple that Peter and John were confronted by a man crippled from birth. We know from vs2 that he was at his usual spot, the gate called Beautiful. He was in a hopeless situation: unable to find employment; without a welfare system to offer support; and no doctor to provide a cure. So each day he would be taken down to the Temple gate where he would beg for his living.

As Peter and John passed by, vs3, the man reached out and he asked for some money, this was known as alms. It was something that was stipulated in the Law of Moses, as a way of ensuring that those who couldn't work or had fallen on hard times, could be provided for by the community and so almsgiving was seen as the fulfilment of the law. However, the fact that the lame man had to beg for money would suggest that this benevolent approach wasn't followed by everyone. Not too different from our own society, perhaps. How embarrassed are you when a beggar; or a Big Issue seller approaches you on the street? Many people turn their gaze away and look the other way and pretend the person doesn't exist. Or we may give some small change or buy a magazine without so much as a conversation because of the embarrassment we feel or wondering what other people would say. As the man begged for alms, he was scanning the crowd for faces which looked like they might be willing to drop something in his cup. And so it must have been quite unexpected that, instead of anonymously dropping pennies into a bowl, Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Look at us!" And the beggar gave them his full attention, expecting to receive something from them. And when they had got his attention, Peter started to speak, vs6: "*Silver or gold I do not have ...*" The lame man was told they had no money, but that they did have something they could give.

Peter and John took a huge step of faith. "*We cannot meet your need from what we have, no one has been able to meet the need, but we do know someone who can, and by the way, he has also authorized us to meet your needs, so in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk.*" .

The lame man had every reason to reject this help. The doctors couldn't help him, he probably thought God had forgotten about him, and this Jesus, to which name Peter and John were proclaiming healing in, well, it was well known he was executed on a cross.

But Peter continued: "*... but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" And then taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. Remember this was the first time he had ever felt the sensations that most of us in this room take for granted. For the first time in his life his feet and ankles did not give way. For the first time in his life he could stand up. And not just stand up, look at what we're told in vs8. "*He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.*"

The lame man made a visible demonstration of the healing power of God. He did not hide it, he did not creep away to enjoy his healing in private, but went amongst the crowd to let them know what God has done for him. We, too, also need to give testimony to the miracles God brings. Vs9-10: "*When all the people saw him walking and praising God; they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*" This is precisely the reaction that should be expected. Such a reaction, however, is not necessarily the same thing as faith in the One who performed the miracles; someone can be impressed by the spectacular without responding to what it signifies: the power and grace of God.

Interestingly, the entrance to the gate called Beautiful is a spot where Jesus would have passed every time he went to the temple to pray and yet Jesus, who was always willing to respond to the needs of those around him, chose not to heal this man. I find that quite amazing, don't you? It can't be that he never saw or heard him – he'd been in the same place for years. A reminder that physical healing isn't always God's plan for our lives (as I know too readily in recent times) but we'll look at little closer at this later. Jesus did not heal this man because he knew that, one day, it would be a wonderful opportunity for Peter and John to offer the gift of healing to him.

The Healing: Shown as the Work of the Risen Jesus, vs11-16: God's miracle working power drew a crowd. They had come to Solomon's Colonnade in astonishment, vs11, at what they had witnessed. Here was the man who was just healed, clinging to Peter and John, living proof of the miracle which had just taken place which now sets the stage for a deeper working in the lives of people. They could all see was that this man had been healed. That wasn't up for debate. What was up for debate – and always is in incidents like this was: what interpretation they should place on the healing?

An atheist might say that it was just the sudden, chance remission of a life-long illness - some nerves just happened to start firing after all those years, and the man started walking - amazing, but nothing more than that. But Peter says: 'No, it is because of Jesus.' And he reminds them that Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead and is alive in heaven – 'glorified' as he puts it in vs13. And Peter tells them that he exercised faith in the risen Jesus that this man could be healed. And so he says the result must be attributed not to chance, but to Jesus.

Too often, it seems to me, people have the tendency to look at the man or the woman who prays the prayer of healing and lose sight of the One who enables the miracle. Peter made it plain, it was not either John or himself, it was through the name of Jesus. Now that begs the question: are we to expect healings like this in the church today? Are we to expect the risen Lord Jesus to be doing this kind of thing among us? Well, some people are keen to say, 'No' because they or others have been hurt by false expectations that the Lord will heal everyone if only they exercise enough faith.