

Sermon Title: Walking And Leaping And Praising God
Scripture Text: Acts 3:1-26 (Acts #8)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-5-23

If you would, please, it's time for us to open our Bibles and turn to Acts, where we arrive in Chapter 3. These next five chapters of Acts record the glorious spread of the Gospel in those first months following the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and that astounding day we read about in Chapter 2 when the first 3,000 baptized converts in Christ were launched.

Chapter 3 is a unit of thought, so I'm going to target the entire chapter for today. We slowed down and took three sermons to get through Peter's first sermon; today, we're going to do his second sermon and the whole chapter surrounding it. This chapter includes a glorious miracle, and then the powerful sermon from Peter. This time, it doesn't tell us anything about how, or how many, people responded; but as we keep working through the chapters ahead, you are going to see that there was an astounding, relentless growth in the number of new believers.

I think you would also see, if we did not have the manmade and often not really helpful chapter divisions, that Chapter 3 is what sets the stage for another very important event in what we call Chapter 4.

So I'm going to bit off a whole chapter. The outline is very simple; it's not a balanced outline of equal amounts in each point, but it describes the chapter: We have The Man, The Miracle, and then The Message.

The Man who is the focal point at the beginning is described in the first three verses, which read like this: "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms." (NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

We don't know exactly when this took place. The passage in our Bibles begins with the word "Now," which is the translation of a Greek conjunction that connotes a connection between what came before and what follows, but also a distinction. So this was *not* the same day as the events of Acts Chapter 2, but it is connected; this is the next part of the story.

And he says it was "at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer." That was about three in the afternoon, and that was the third of three regular daily times for prayer in the Temple. Peter and John were doing what devout Jews would do. If you were around the Temple at nine, noon, and three, you would come for a time of public prayer; that's what the Jews would do.

Except now, Peter and John have the Holy Spirit; they have the message of eternal life. And as we saw back in Chapter 2, Verse 42, the new believers in Christ "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (NKJV)—but literally, it's "in the prayers" (LSB). While they were in Jerusalem, they kept going at the time of public prayer; that's when a lot of people would be there—what better time to have a Gospel presentation opportunity?

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We are just told "a man" was there. I am sure somebody somewhere has decided they know what this guy's name was. We don't know, and it does not matter. But it was a common scene: Those who depended upon begging would go to the best places to beg. They did not have disability insurance and Social Security and things like that; some people were reduced to not eating if there weren't enough contributions given.

So the Temple was the best place to be for begging—not only because the most people came by there every day in Jerusalem, but remember: The religion of the Jews, dominated by the Pharisees in Jesus' day, was given over to doing showy things to impress God by their visible acts of charity. That's what Jesus confronted in the Sermon on the Mount; in Matthew Chapter 6, Verses 1 through 4, He said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness" *to be seen* by "men" (vs. 1)—they did it for a show. Well, if you are on the receiving end of people trying to work their way to Heaven, the best place to be is where the most people want to be seen giving the most contributions. So, not to fault this guy—that was the best place to be.

He was at this gate called "the Beautiful Gate" (vs. 10). That was not one of the outside gates into the city of Jerusalem, but "the Beautiful Gate" connected the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women. Probably somewhere in the back of your Bible, if you have a study Bible, you can see a diagram of the Temple; you can figure out where that is. It was an extremely ornate gate; it was decorated extensively with bronze—so when they said, "I don't have silver and gold to give you," it's kind of like, "In contrast to this gaudy place where we are."

It said he was asking to receive "alms." "Alms" are charitable donations. We would call it "The Benevolent Fund"—taking care of those emergency, immediate needs. And you often see scenes like this, much more so in other cultures—sometimes in society in general, but especially at religious sites. The people who subsist on the generosity of others would be where the most traffic is.

That's The Man, which leads to The Miracle in Verses 4 through 11. Two things happen here. First: What stands out is what happened to this man, this miraculous cure of this guy who had *never walked*. It was a spectacular, undeniable miracle performed by Peter (cf. Acts 4:16; Heb. 2:4), and that is how the biblical gift of "miracles" worked (1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29). It was the God-given ability to effect *instant* and *total* cures of any kind of disease or deformity (cf. Matt. 9:35).

So look at it, starting in Verse 4—"But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'Look at us!' " You can understand that if you were reduced to begging, you may not want to make a lot of eye contact; but they wanted to engage with this guy. " 'Look at us!' And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!' " Oh, *Wow!*

Miracles were done in the New Testament by Jesus and the Apostles, usually by a word or a touch, or both; in this case: both. He said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" and he reached out his hand and helped the guy up, and he was *instantly* healed.

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Look at Verses 7 and 8—"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright..." I just saw an animal show the other day, and the newborn moose trying to get up for the first time, and it has four legs going nine directions. This was not like a first step; he *leapt up!* "With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God." *Wow!*

That leads to the second thing that happens. The focus is immediately off that guy and his condition. We have one more little thing said about him in the text that kind of implies that this brought him to faith, but the focus is not on him. What happened to him was immediately used by God to draw attention and to set the stage for Peter to preach again. Look at Verses 9 through 11—"And all the people saw him walking and praising God." What "all people"? All the people in the Temple. That was the thing that got everybody's attention! Verse 10—"and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While he was clinging to Peter and John"—can't blame him for that; he probably figured, "What if those guys walk away? Am I going to go back on the ground again?"—"While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement."

They had probably heard about Peter preaching before; if they were not present, they had probably heard about the "sound like a mighty rushing wind" and the "divided tongues as of fire" and the gifts of languages (Acts 2:2-4, ESV)—they figured something was up. God's purpose for this miracle was to arrange for the Gospel to be preached to "all the people" who were present in the Temple that afternoon; and it was another large crowd.

This is the first healing recorded in the Book of Acts. It is an example of how such miracles took place. Did you notice what Peter and John did in order to heal this guy? They merely spoke to him, and "raised him up."

It is tempting to point out that no one among the people in *this* generation who now *claim* to have the gift of healing do that. The sum total is: *zero!* That is not being done today. Now, I would be happy if it *did!* But that is not operating today.

We have dealt with miracles and healing several times in the past, and I can direct you to recordings where we dealt with it in detail if you want to pursue it. But just understand: This is a *profoundly* obvious, spectacular miracle!

Now, how did this man demonstrate faith before he was healed? That's another important point: he did not. He did *nothing* to show faith, before he was healed. Teaching that people are not healed because *they* don't have enough faith is a perversion of what the Bible teaches, and every example of healing that we have. Those healed are often *not* believers.

And by the way: To tell somebody, "Well, the reason *you* were not healed is that you don't have enough faith," or, "You haven't made a sufficient 'seed offering' yet"—that is one of the most *cruel, blasphemous, anti-Christian* things *anyone* could ever say!

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Would you also notice how much time elapsed for this healing to take effect: *instantly!* Instantaneous! The idea these days of, "Well, you can come forward and you can 'claim' your healing; and then as you pray and as you study, and maybe as you give more, your 'miraculous' healing may set in over the next several days"—*totally* contrary to the Bible!

What was the result of this miracle? Well, would you notice that Peter and John did not say, "Form a line over here to wait for your healing." No, the purpose is that God was praised and the interest was piqued for people to hear *why* it had been possible. And as with all the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, it was *directly* tied to the proclamation of God's "grace" through the Gospel (Acts 14:3; cf. Jn. 5:36; Heb. 2:3-4).

Now, I'll give you a hint, based on some of those things we've just said: If you hear an advertisement—there's a certain sign on a certain road at a certain church that we go by many times a week that advertises their "Healing Service"—when you see that, *just keep driving!* That is *not* a Christian gathering! *Never* is the purpose "gathering" for "healing," "gathering" for "miracles"! When the Holy Spirit *actually* works—whether it is a miracle, or if it's the providential use of other non-miraculous gifts that God gives—the attention, when the Holy Spirit works, is never on the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13-14); the attention is always, not on the miracle and not on the person healed—it's on the Savior; it's on the Gospel. And *that* is the point here.

The Man—never walked. The Miracle—totally healed, immediately. Now, The Message: Peter's message.

God intended this miracle to gather a crowd, to draw attention. So let's examine this message, and we are going to plow through it all the way; but let's look for what applications we can make for how we talk about the Lord when we have an opportunity—because our situation is quite different from that one.

But let's read about this message that Peter preached: in Chapter 3, we will start at Verse 12—"But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people..." He "saw" what? Well, he "saw" everybody in the whole Temple running over to see what happened, and this guy "walking and leaping and praising God"—and they had walked past him, who knows *how many times*, and maybe dropped something in the cup; and here's this guy "leaping and praising God," so they are all running "together"; and Peter says, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us"—well...come on, Peter! *It's because of what the guy is doing, after you healed him!* But he says, "as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus..." It took him, what, *two sentences*—and the subject is now Jesus. That is the point of the miracle. "Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."

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If that is referring to the man receiving faith, then the man got saved that day. I would sure like to *think* that he did, and I think he began a gymnastics fellowship immediately for the people around.

The miracle is *spectacular!* People are *rightly* amazed and curious. And Peter *immediately* shifts the focus of attention from the guy to God—not on himself, not on him and John, not on the healed man; he was quite specific: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him." Wow! What credit did he take for the healing? None. It all belongs entirely to God.

And as I said: They did not tell people to line up for *their* turn to be healed. They immediately turned the attention to the Father and the Son. If they had done 50 more healings that day, it would not have served any further purpose to accredit the message of Peter and John.

Now, since *you* cannot speak to that generation who killed Jesus, what should *you* say to someone in place of what Peter said in Verses 14 and 15, about how "*you* killed Jesus; *you* shouted out to Pilate"? Well, the way to import the message from *that* generation to *any* generation, to *any* culture, is to point out that Christ died in your place (Is. 53:5-8; Matt. 20:28), He "rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15), and He calls you to Himself (Matt. 11:28). It's that simple! Turn the attention to Jesus (1 Cor. 2:2).

Do you see also in this passage: The responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God are again both stated side by side (cf. Gen. 50:20). Look at Verses 17 and 18—"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled."

Again, Peter is saying what he said back in Chapter 2: This plan was "announced" by "God" *hundreds* of years in advance! And sinners sent Jesus to the Cross, but sinners are also responsible for: "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One" (vs. 14). And *today*, people are responsible for their personal version of: "You have not put your faith in Jesus Christ." (e.g., Jn. 3:18, 36)

So—you knew *this* was coming—look at Verse 19, and following: "Therefore"—because God did this, because "you disowned the Holy and Righteous One," God "raised" Him up—"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

That phrase "times of refreshing," and the phrase "the period of restoration"—they are two different ways of referring to the Millennial Kingdom (see Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6; cf. Zech. 14:8-9, 16-17; Rev. 20:4-6)—just like Peter did Chapter 2, when he connected the arrival of the Holy Spirit to Joel's prophecy about the Messianic kingdom, he says the same thing here in different words.

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This is the plan of God: Jesus came, He died, He was buried, He rose again, He ascended to the Father, and He is going to stay there until He brings the Kingdom to Earth (Matt. 25:31, 34).

So, once you have someone's attention—even if you don't have a formerly-lame guy "walking and leaping and praising God"—and you have explained that "Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures" (1 cor. 15:3), what do you do next? Well, I suggest: Take your cue from Peter: "Therefore repent and return."

There are a lot of things that Peter *did not* say here. He doesn't say, "Ask Jesus into your heart." When I visited India forty-plus years ago, I was with a group of evangelical American pastors, and we were there to see what the believers there were doing; but just about two weeks before we were there, one of the most famous American Charismatic evangelists had done a crusade in several cities in India, and he would gather large crowds. And I'll tell you how to gather a large crowd in India: Go *anywhere*; in any town anywhere, there are people everywhere. But he went to stadiums—everyplace they could, and gathered these large crowds, and he preached his message. And he said, "Ask Jesus into your heart. He's God; ask Him into your heart." And he claimed something like 250,000 conversions.

Now, *none* of the pastors that we talked to had ever seen *any* of those people in their churches. Well, why? Well, it's the Hindu culture. Hinduism has about *220 million* gods—some local, some regional, some territorial, the "big" one. And they live in fear that if something goes wrong in their lives—and in that culture, they don't have it very good—well, that's because you have, even unknowingly, offended one of those gods. So they'll have a shrine in their backyard to try to placate the local gods that they know of. So if you tell somebody who already believes in 220 million gods, "Well, I know this God named Jesus; ask Him into your heart"—well, *sure!* If you already have 220 million, what's 220 million *and one*? Not that He is the One to whom all of those supposed gods will answer!

He does not say, "Enter into a personal relationship with Jesus." My friends, Jesus is Lord; and if you don't know Him now, He *will* get personal with you—whether you are personal with Him now or not.

He didn't say that mantra that is so popular these days: "Well, this isn't about religion." Well, yes, it *is!* It's just that it's not about *human* religion of trying to work your way to God, it's about the religion of God's provision of a Savior in Christ (Phil. 3:3-9; Titus 3:5).

He *certainly* did not tell these people, "You can have your best life now!" Remember when that book came out? I made the rather obvious point that the only way you can say to people, "You can have your best life now" is "if you're going to hell" (cf. Ps. 17:14; Lk. 6:24-25; 16:25)—because what we have now is going to be *nothing* compared to being "with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8; cf. Rom. 8:18; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 21:4).

He *certainly* does not say, "Look inside yourself and learn to love yourself so you can love other people." (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5b; 2 Tim. 3:1-2).

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He does not say, "Jesus loves you just the way you are." (contra Matt. 7:11a, Jn. 13:8; Titus 2:14; 3:3-5; Rev. 7:14) He will *accept* you as you come (e.g., Matt. 11:28; 21:32; Lk. 18:13-14; Rom. 3:28; 4:5), but Peter certainly doesn't say anything like that.

He doesn't say, "He 'gets' us!"

He said the most loving, kind, truthful thing he could: "Your Savior came. You rejected Him. He *died*. He rose again. He ascended to the Father. He is coming back. *Therefore*, repent! Change your mind about Him! Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away!"

That's the very same call that he gave in the previous sermon in the previous chapter, when those "three thousand" people believed (2:41). It was back in Chapter 2, Verse 38 and then Verse 40—"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'...And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' "

My friends, we have *the message that makes the difference* between "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 14-15) and the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Rev. 21:1) as a person's eternal destiny! Don't be afraid, don't be embarrassed, don't be ashamed, don't be shy to say, "Therefore, my friend, repent and return!" A Gospel presentation that is devoid of a call to repent *is not a Gospel presentation!* (cf. Mk. 1:15; Acts 17:30-31; 20:21)

It is tragic that in American Christianity, we have gotten so "touchy-feely" that it is common to avoid things like "sin" and "repentance" and "humbling oneself" when we present the Gospel, *but that's what it's all about!* It's a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Ezek. 36:27; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10)—all by the grace of God, but it is a changed life! Change your direction (Dan. 9:13; Acts 14:15; 26:18). Repent! Come to the Savior!

Look at Verses 22 to 24—"Moses said..." Now who is he preaching to? Jews, in the Temple; pretty good to quote Moses. "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days."

Now, look carefully there: According to those verses, *why is anyone ever* condemned?—or, as Peter said, "utterly destroyed"? Well, if you *don't turn to Christ*, that will be your eternal destiny! (2 Thess. 1:8-9)

His quotation is from Deuteronomy 18, and that is where Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me" (vs. 15)—referring to himself, Moses. That is a prophecy of the Savior; it's a prophecy of Jesus Christ. A person is condemned if they fail to heed the Word of God through His prophets—all of which point, ultimately, to Christ. We need to include in the Gospel presentation the warning that to disobey this is to be—well, there's no polite way to say it: "utterly destroyed"! That's not what you want!

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What is that referring to? Well, if you were to go ahead to Revelation Chapter 20—I won't take you there now, but that is where the event of the so-called "Great White Throne Judgment" is involved, and that is where *all* unbelievers are judged. The basis of the judgment is: the "deeds" that they have done (vss. 12-13). And it says the "books were opened" (vs. 12), and "the books" contained everything every person there had ever done, thought, or said—that is what is in "the books" (cf. Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36). And the Judge at that judgment is *perfectly* fair (Ps. 9:8; 96:10; 08:9). He is *completely* unbiased (Rom. 1:22; Eph. 6:9). He takes *every* shred of evidence into account (Prov. 15:3; cf. Ps. 44:21), and He yields a "righteous judgment" (Rom. 2:5).

Everyone who is there *falls short* of the standard for salvation (Rom. 3:23), which is: perfection (Matt. 5:48; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). And so they are all sentenced to "the lake of fire" (vs. 14-15; cf. Matt. 25:41). They are the ones who are *not* "in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 5:17). And if you read before that, it talks about those who are blessed to be part of "the first resurrection" (vss. 5-6)—*that* is the resurrection of believers, the resurrection of those who are judged on the basis of Jesus' perfection, not *their* imperfection (2 Cor. 5:21).

What an *astonishing* outpouring of grace we have in Jesus Christ! You know it, in capsule form, in John 3:16—"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Two destinies: "perish," eternal torment in the Lake of Fire—or, "eternal life." By putting your faith in Jesus Christ, you are spared from "the wrath of God" that you deserve (Rev. 14:10); and rather than being judged on the basis of everything you have ever done or said or thought, you will be judged as He looks at you: "clothed" in the "righteousness" of Christ (Is. 61:10; cf. Matt. 3:15), which has been imputed to you (Rom. 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

Another way to describe that is in Romans Chapter 5, Verses 8 through 10—"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners"—as a matter of fact, way before we were born—"Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." What a *great message!*

Peter isn't finished; he ends on the sweetest of high notes. The last two verses: 25 and 26—"It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." How *spectacular* is that?

We read this morning in Romans Chapter 9, where Paul says, "I am grieved for my people who *don't know their Savior!*" And Peter says to his Jewish friends: "For you first"—*all* the Jews who heard him that day.

Now, it's true: It was *their* spiritual leaders who earned the title "this perverse generation"—as when Peter said, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40). But Peter takes them all the way back to the foundation of all the promises of the Savior.

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The covenant of all the covenants is the Abrahamic Covenant; and as it is described in Genesis 22:18, that is where it says to Abraham: "In your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So this is a promise that one of Abraham's descendants will be a Savior for "all the families of the earth" (cf. Is. 49:6). But it started with the people that Jesus came to (Matt. 10:6; 15:24). He rightly says to the Jews to whom he preached that this is "for you first." The Gospel is for "the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16), but also to "all the families of the earth" (cf. Rev. 5:9).

That's where we come into this sermon: "All the families of the earth"—even six or seven thousand miles and two thousand years later, where it's really hard to even *find* one single Jew, people are being saved by this very same message.

You might also know Romans 1:16—"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Now, don't get bummed out here, if you're sitting there saying, "Well, I'm not a Jew. I'm not a Greek. I guess I can't get saved." No, no. "Greek" means "not Jew"—it's a synonym for Gentile, in that context.

All this is fulfilled in Christ, starting with that promise to Abraham (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

I know we have powered through an entire chapter, but I think in this case it is helpful to consume it in one gulp. The message is the same that it was in Chapter 2, but I want to urge us to think about how to apply it in *our* setting.

We are not in Jerusalem. We are not in the Temple. Our audience is not Jews. We cannot take the people we are talking to on a little ten-minute walk to show them the empty tomb of Jesus. But it's the same message.

So, what can we extract by way of principle from Acts Chapter 3 that we can use when we talk to someone about Christ? Let me make a couple of suggestions to you.

Number 1: Any Gospel presentation has to be theocentric, not anthropocentric. And I decided to use a couple of 25-cent words in case you were dozing off; maybe you'll remember it. A Gospel presentation is *God-centered*, not man-centered (Rom. 11:36).

I had a friend when I was in seminary; he actually wrote a Gospel tract. He wanted to deal with what he called the "Peanuts/Popcorn Presentation of the Gospel." He would go to the baseball game, and there would be a guy walking through who had all kinds of stuff hanging from his body and strapped to him: "Well, what do you want? Peanuts, popcorn, soda, souvenirs! What would you like?" And my friend said, "We present the Gospel the same way! 'What do you want? Peace, happiness, affluence, comfort!' " No, no, no, no. "My friend, God created you in His image; and through your sin, you're alienated from Him! I'm not here to give you peanuts and popcorn, I'm here to give you a Savior!"

The essence of the Gospel is *not* about making you *feel better*, it's about restoring you to the God *from* whom you are alienated (Is. 59:2), and *to* whom you are "accountable" (Rom. 3:19; 1 Pet. 4:5).

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And then, once you are "reconciled to God" (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20)—oh, trust me, the personal blessings are *unending*! But you have to take care of that "reconciliation" to God first (Rom. 5:11), by receiving the "free gift" that He gives to you (Rom. 6:23).

Understand, too: When we say that *that* is the Gospel presentation, you are probably on the other end of it: You have *heard* the presentation, you *have* repented, you *have* believed, your sins *have been* taken away—and that means that you can have the unending comfort of knowing that salvation is *all yours, done deal, all of God...we contribute nothing; we receive it as a "free gift."* It is the God-centered salvation because *He* is the one who sent the Savior (Jn. 3:17; Rom. 8:32; Gal. 4:4; 1 Jn. 4:9-10, 14).

Notice also that a Gospel presentation must include explaining what the Word of God says—the facts: Christ died in your place, He rose again—and it also has to include man's responsibility to answer the invitation and to repent (Heb. 2:3; 12:25).

What provokes an opportunity to share the Gospel could be almost anything. Ray Comfort is famous for talking to somebody and saying, "Do you consider yourself to be a good person?" And the standard answer is, "Well, yeah. You know, I haven't murdered anybody all day long; and, uh, you know, I'm better than *some* people!" And then he takes them to the Ten Commandments: "Have you ever done this?" "Well, yeah." "Have you ever done that?" "Yeah." "Okay—well, now we have established that you are a liar, an adulterer, an idolater. Do you consider yourself a good person? What would a righteous God say to somebody who has done the things that you have done? Would you deserve Heaven or Hell?" He's very good at doing that, and I would commend him to you.

It isn't about the opportunities. We probably *cannot* go find a person that has never walked, and have him "walking and leaping and praising God" next to us. That would draw attention; I get that.

I remember the first person that I ever introduced to Christ. It was a person I met when I was in college. She was a late teenager, and she shared with me that she had some real problems—and she *did* have some real problems. For one thing, she was the youngest of five kids; the other four were boys, and they were older than her; and her father was in the Marine Corps. I mean, scary life, right? But she had other problems, too. And she said, "Can you help me?" And I said, "No!" I didn't have any answers to any of those things! I had only been a Christian a few months. But I said, "But I think I know somebody who can," and I told her the Gospel. And I said, "Are you willing to repent and give your life to Christ?" And she said, "Yes!" *Wow!* God used me—I *knew barely anything!* Well, the point is: The *circumstances* might expose the *need* that creates the *opportunity* that you explain who the Savior is.

You saw the passion that Peter demonstrated for his countrymen there. Ask God to give *you* a similar heart of compassion for "people" who need the Lord (1 Thess. 3:12).

And direct the attention to God, and away from yourself. If you are willing to focus the attention on God, not yourself, you can be used mightily to guide people to call upon Him in repentance and in faith.

Sermon Title: Walking And Leaping And Praising God
Scripture Text: Acts 3:1-26 (Acts #8)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-5-23

And you know what? You might be concerned that maybe somebody would turn their back on you or reject you and not like you. Could happen. But I would rather they hear about Heaven not liking me, than go to Hell and never heard about heaven, because I did not speak (cf. Ezek. 3:18-21).

A fellow pastor put me on to this. I'll close with this. It's from an English Puritan pastor named Thomas Manton. He wrote a book entitled "By Faith"; it's a series of sermons on Hebrews 11—the "faith" chapter: "By faith" all these people did these different things. Here is what Manton wrote; I'll pass it on to you.

He says: "The whole business of Christianity contradicts sense. We give up the visible for invisible rewards. Sense only judges the outside of God's dispensations, but faith looks within the veil. There are secret and invisible things that God makes known to waiting souls, when there is no apparent comfort. There is not a drop of oil in the cruse"—that means the jar—"nor a dust of meal in the barrel. Hope can hang on a small thread. Wait, trust, and look for favor from God."

And that was based upon: "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

I know you have probably heard the Gospel, believed; you're here. Be encouraged: It is a life-changing, eternal-destiny-changing message! Let's pray that God will give us an opportunity to share it. And if, my friend, perchance you have never submitted *your* life to Jesus Christ—oh, today is the *perfect* day to do that!

Let's pray together, shall we?

Our Father, thank You for Your wonderful grace to us. We will never know, until we meet him in Your presence, the name of that man; but thank You for the miracle that drew the crowd on that day that stimulated this sermon that we have heard from the lips of Peter. And Father, it would be easy for us to say, "Oh, if only we had that gift like Peter and John—we could leave church here and go down the street to St. Alphonsus Hospital, and split up and go floor by floor and room by room, and empty the place, and tell people about the Savior! Oh, I admit, Father—that would be wonderful. But we don't need to do that, because You have given us the Gospel of Your grace; You have given us Your Spirit, the One who "convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment." So send us from where we are now to where we will go in this week, and open hearts to people around us; open our mouths to "speak truth in love," and draw souls to Yourself, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.