

+ Acts 3:1-10 + Our God Does All Things Well + 16th Sunday after Pentecost + 20 September 2009 +

Our God does all things well! It was a typical afternoon at the temple complex in Jerusalem. The ninth hour had come—about 3:00 in the afternoon. The courts were bustling with people making their way into the temple for the evening sacrifice. Many chose to pass through Beautiful Gate on the east side of the temple. Years before King Herod had had the entire gate sheathed in bronze from top to bottom, so it was a popular entrance.

Being such a busy entrance to the temple courts, it was also a favorite spot for beggars. It wasn't unusual to pass by the poor and paralyzed as they pleaded for a little money, but there was one crippled beggar, who always had the spot right at the entrance to Beautiful Gate. He was there everyday—rain or shine, hot or cold. Everyone knew him.

The man had been crippled since birth over forty years before. There had always been something wrong with his feet and ankles. It had always been impossible for this man to move himself and take care of himself. He was helpless, so loved ones would carry him on a mat to Beautiful Gate, where he would daily beg for money hoping for a few drachma each day. As people passed him, some wondered why God would allow someone to endure such a life of pain and paralysis. Some even wondered if his parents had sinned, but many in sadness or disgust avoided him. Still he kept coming back. So this day like every other day before, the crippled beggar was carried to Beautiful Gate. Like every other day, he begged for the pity of the templegoers. He hoped for a good return, but didn't expect much.

As he looked out at the crowd, he noticed two Galilean men. They looked a little rough around the edges talking to each other with their unique backwater accent. They had a confidence about them, but being Galilean, perhaps they seemed a little naïve coming from the sticks. Maybe they would give him some money. It's possible he had seen them come to the temple before with a group of people who followed a teacher named Jesus. He had heard plenty about Jesus in the past and he knew this Jesus had caused a lot of commotion recently with a triumphant entrance, reports of night trials, his crucifixion, and then reports of an empty tomb. These followers of Jesus came to the temple courts every day, but they had a good reputation among the people, especially in their kindness.

The two Galilean Jesus-followers neared the beggar's spot. As soon as they were within earshot, he cried out, "Have mercy on me! I've been crippled since birth! Can you spare a drachma? Come on, you've got to have a little change in your pouch!" As usual, most people chose to ignore the beggar, but not the two men from Galilee. In fact, as they were about to enter the temple courts, the beggar made one last plea for money, but they passed from his gaze. So he cried out to others in the crowd, but the two Galileans stopped within the gate. They turned around and came back. They stared at the man. The one who was called Peter said, "**Look at us!**" The beggar gave them his attention. People usually looked away from the beggar and he rarely looked them in the eye, but something very different was happening. A small glimmer of hope began to grow inside the beggar. He hoped for a hand-out. "Will they come through and make my day?"

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you." For a poor, crippled beggar, those were depressing words. "No silver? No gold? No hand-out?", the beggar thought. **"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."** Instead of a hand-out, the one called Peter reached out his hand and helped the man up. **"Instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk."** It all happened so quickly the beggar didn't realize what had happened. One moment he was as crippled as he was on the day he was born. The next moment he was upright for the first time in his life, but more than that. He could jump. He could walk. He could run. The healed man so overflowed with joy that surely the two Galileans received very unexpected hugs.

For his entire life, this man had suffered physical pain and paralysis. Surely there were times when he had wondered why God had allowed him to be in such a state for so long. Surely there were times when worshipers at the temple looked at him with pity and questioned God's goodness and grace, but this man didn't need a long, drawn-out rehab process to learn how to walk. No, he was healed instantly. He knew exactly who had healed him.

He had been healed **"in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..."** This man, who practically lived at the temple, had heard about Jesus and maybe even caught a glimpse of him in the temple courts. Suddenly the pieces were coming together, and he was overwhelmed by the miraculous display of God's grace in the name of Christ. He wasn't about to leave the side of Peter and John, so **"he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping...and praising God."** Our God does all things well!

...But why of all the beggars at the temple that day did the Lord heal that man? When this man went to the temple that day, he certainly didn't expect to be healed. He had been crippled since birth. Reason told him he couldn't expect a miracle, but yet God still healed him. It wasn't because he had such a great faith and believed hard enough that a miracle would happen. It wasn't because he had decided that the time was right to be healed. He didn't even pray to be healed. He never thought it would happen, but the power and grace of Jesus Christ accomplished the impossible.

Our text doesn't really give us much of an explanation except what we have in the last two verses. ***"When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized 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."*** We're told the people were so astonished that they cut their evening prayers short to rush over to the three men to find out what had happened. Peter, then, took the opportunity to point them to the Source of the healing. ***"Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus..."***

Our God healed this man to bring attention to his Word and to the Savior of all—Jesus Christ. ***"He has done everything well."*** This Christ came to live, to suffer, to die for sin. The people needed to hear that, as Peter explained, ***"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 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."*** The Lord healed this man to call the people to repentance so they would turn from their wicked ways and follow Christ. The Lord provided an opportunity for his forgiveness, guaranteed in the blood of Christ, to be proclaimed clearly through his Word confirmed in this display of God's work. We're told the people gave glory to God, who has done all things well.

So what does it matter for you and me today that a crippled beggar was healed on a typical afternoon in the temple? It matters because our sinful natures mock our God and the fact that he has done everything well. It's a common argument against the Christian faith that if God really is good and really is love, then why does he allow misery and need and pain and suffering in the first place? Why doesn't God remove things like hunger and poverty and cancer and pain and grief and a host of other effects of sin that plague mankind? If he really does all things well, then why all the misery?

At times like that, however, when we as Christians are in the greatest need or misery, our only source of confidence and hope is the truth that God has done all things well. It was into a situation of misery and poverty that the Christ Child was conceived and born, but still God became flesh for us. It was into opposition and trouble and suffering and pain and death that Jesus carried out his ministry to the very end, but still Christ was victorious over sin and Satan and death for us. It was into those situations of human need and misery that God placed himself so he could do all things well in our place, when we could not. In that way, he saved us from our desperate need.

With the reality that Christ endured suffering in your place, by faith you can have a quiet confidence when it comes to your own suffering. Your God does all things well as he did for the beggar and as you see in your own life. He doesn't normally use miracles, but think about it. How much suffering does the Lord keep from your life that you don't even realize? Our God does all things well! When he does allow suffering to enter your life, are there not times when he delivers you? Our God does all things well. When the Lord withholds relief in times of suffering, does he not preserve you to endure because his grace is sufficient and because he has given you a cross in order to bear witness to his grace and power, to realize when you are weak, you are actually strong in Christ? Our God does all things well.

People see that and wonder, "How can you endure that?" It's not because you're super-human, because you're not. It's not because you're so strong, because you're not. It's because of Christ, your Strength, who bore the beatings and the lashings and the cross and the tomb for you. It's because of Christ, your Rock, your firm Foundation, your Fortress, your Shield, no matter what life throws at you. Suddenly people have reason to listen to the Word of God, because through you they see the need for Christ.

That truth is the reason you can have hope when life seems to take a dramatic turn for the worse or difficulty becomes a common reality of life. Your hope is based on the promises of God to never leave nor forsake you, to always be by your side, to be your refuge and strength. That hope is guaranteed by the work of Christ, who suffered the ultimate woe—being forsaken by his heavenly Father—in your place so you can be where he is.

Our God does all things well. When the Lord allows you to endure suffering or trouble or woe or a cross of any kind, may he use it to draw you to Christ, your only Savior, your only Hope, and to his Word, through which he will strengthen and encourage you to the end. May he use your difficulty, your suffering, your cross also to draw others to their life-giving Savior and his life-giving Word. May we never forget our God does all things well! Amen.