



It strikes me that everything in this world breaks down, rots, and rusts because human beings left the source and sustainer of life so there is only death and decay. Because of sin, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen 3:1-19) “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rats destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” (Matt 6:19)

Last week, we thought about how the gospel can enable us to be so clothed by Christ that we can stop feeling ashamed. But what good is any of it if we still decay, get old, and eventually die? Acts 3 shows us what God has in mind for this broken world and for anyone who trusts him to make them whole again. This passage is an act of kindness towards a paralyzed man that gives us a picture of how God is putting things right in our broken world. It can be summarised by 3 main headings that I’ve borrowed from the church’s strapline: Reach out. Buildup. Send out.

Reach out The paralysed man was sitting at the Gate Beautiful on the temple mount by the outer courtyard of the gentiles surrounded by Solomon’s colonnade where Jesus and later the apostles preached from. The main gate leading to the inner courtyard of the temple was made of Corinthian bronze 23m high. It would have glimmered in the middle eastern sunshine. All his life some kind person carried this man to the gates every day to beg. When many worshippers arrived he had a chance of someone throwing him some coins. It is ironic that before the Beautiful Gate, sat a broken beggar, paralysed and not beautiful. The Old Covenant community ordered by God was not working. God had commanded in Deuteronomy 15 that his people should not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted so that none of his people would be poor and go without but here was this poor 40 something Jewish man begging in front of these beautiful gates. “... there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God. (Deut 15:4-5) If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward you them. Rather, be open handed and freely lend them whatever they need.” (Deut 15:7-8) Being religious does not help us reach people. Good people, religious or not often reach out and do some amazing acts of kindness but they can only go so far with coins. They are not what the man really needed. Ultimately these huge acts of kindness weren’t enough.

Paralysed from birth, he must have been in great pain, 40+ degrees in the summer heat, pressure sores on his skin, unable to go to the toilet perhaps for hours until someone came to carry him home. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, he must have expected this would be his life until he died. When Peter and John walk past, he doesn’t even look up at them. It’s a picture of a broken man without hope. What a challenge for us. Do we see the need around us? Right through the whole of life: the baby crying, needing to be held, the toddler needing to play, the teenager, anxious about school or friends who come and go, trying to fit in, the adult at work, stressed to keep up, another with no work and feeling the hopelessness day after day, or someone with daily battles with their mental health and/or addiction, the older person diagnosed with cancer or bereaved and now alone. It can feel a bit overwhelming. Where do we start? I think the answer is we start at the gate. We start by reaching out to whoever God brings across our path. We all live in this sin-broken world.

God’s amazing answer was that he reached out to us. He went looking for Adam and Eve in the garden after the fall. He sent his only begotten son, our Emmanuel, God with us, to reach out to our needs and as Christians we too must see the need around us and join God in his heart of compassion to reach out to people. “Peter and John looked straight at him with this attention. “look at us”. They are reaching out and a connection is made. We too need to see the need and make the connection with people’s need; in a church service, in play corner, in coffee morning, in choir practice, on the golf course, in work or school, across the dinner table. Take note of the need and to reach out with the same compassion when Jesus reached out to us.

Build up Peter gets the man's attention, the man looked at them expecting to get something. We need to exceed people's expectations and show them Christ. The beggar expects coins but Peter says to the man these amazing words, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk." Ultimately even this was not enough. The Beggar would get old and eventually die. The real healing, the real miracle is that the man believed. He believed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Believing in Jesus meant a physical healing but it also meant a new, joyful, trusting relationship between the beggar and Jesus.

God does not promise to heal everyone. We are called to take up our cross to follow him, but here is a miracle that has not stopped happening since Jesus was here, the miracle of salvation. Throughout the Old Testament God's name was not to be said out loud because it was so holy. But now, we have a name for God which we say out loud as a name we can rely on. It is not a magic wand. His name stands for all that Jesus is: his sovereignty over death, his authority to forgive sin and his power to save and heal broken lives. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom 10:13)

Every time we share communion we remember "This is my body broken for you". If Jesus was willing to die for your sins, then we can be sure he will forgive us and one day raise us up with him to new life. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him" (Rom 5:8) In the same way believe him, to trust him to help you, to save you, and mend your broken heart and life.

Implications: Peter holds out his right hand to help him up. It's a right hand of fellowship. There is a lot of imagery in the Bible of God's mighty right hand, power and fellowship. The beggar reaches out his hand to take hold of Peter's hand. That initial reaching out and connection reaches a new level. In fact we're told that the beggar goes with them and then holds on to them in the temple while Peter preaches. A new bond exists between these 3 people who share the same faith in the same Lord. Instantly his feet and ankles became strong. In the same way, the moment you believe is the moment your heart is changed forever, blind eyes open, spiritual deadness becomes alive and we see God for who he really is. We love him for the first time, we respond to him and respond in obedience to him,

Send out. Having trusted Jesus, every Christian is called to obedience and is sent out to reach out and to build up. Jesus gave us the great commission, "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" I doubt that the man at the gate had ever heard the great commission but we're told that he went with them into the temple courts, "walking and jumping, and praising God."

We are to preach, proclaim and explain the gospel. Peter delivered a powerful, blistering evangelistic sermon where near 2000 people were saved. But we also proclaim it with our lives. We might not be able to explain the intricacies of substitutionary atonement or justification by propitiation of wrath and expiation of sin, but every Christian knows deeply and personally that Jesus has taken what was a broken me and made me whole again. Each one of us knows what it's like to have our sins forgiven, to be loved and cherished by God. All of us who are believers can tell others that all I know is that Jesus has saved me. Jesus is my Lord and he can save you too. The sign of salvation is the changed life. The man doesn't preach but he walks and jumps and praises God with the sheer joy of what God has done for him. It is clear to everyone. "For Christ's love compels us" (2 Cor 5) "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh 8:70) Our lives and the Life of Ebenezer should be characterised by joy. If not physically jumping for joy then at least inwardly a joy of the Lord that is our strength, that sends us out to reach out and build up!

Conclusions. We started off thinking about the fact that like the paralysed beggar at the gate, this world is broken. We are broken by sin. Jesus Christ was broken on the cross but God raised him from the dead and he did it for you and me so that by believing in his great name, the name of Jesus of Nazareth, you and I can rise up and walk!

AMEN,