

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus' Faithful Witnesses... ...bearing witness to Jesus' life-changing message.

(Studies in the book of Acts)

Trade-Offs

(Acts 2:42-47)

Study #5

Introduction: Choose this or that...

Life is a series of trade-offs.

It takes me a couple of hours to mow and trim our yard. It would cost money to hire someone for the job. But if I hired someone, I could do something else productive with that time. But I like yardwork. What to do? It's a trade-off. Time vs. money.

I learned a long time ago that when it comes to buying tools, it makes sense to spend the extra money to buy quality. Cheap tools break before their time. The trade-off? Quality vs. cost.

You want to send a text to a co-worker, and you don't have much time. So, you quickly type it and quickly send it. You save time by not checking it for typos. That time saved could end up costing you if you made one of a thousand famous texting errors. The trade-off is speed vs accuracy.

Every day, we make decisions that are nothing but trade-offs.

Today, among other things, we watch the apostles Peter and John make a trade-off that reveals the depth of their passion to follow Jesus - and they call us to follow them as they follow Him.

After the miracles that happened on the Day of Pentecost, Luke tells us that, *[Acts 2:43] many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.*

We figure that not very much time elapsed between Pentecost and what we'll see today. Days, maybe. A couple of weeks at the most. Luek tells us about one of these *"wonders."*

A Lame Man Walks, Leaps, Praises God! (Acts 3:1-10)

The Wonder of Convergence (3:1-3)

*Two apostles on their way to the temple at the hour of prayer
(v.1)*

[1] Now Peter and John were going up¹ to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.²

This scene highlights the Jewishness of early Christianity. Let's not forget that at this moment, every Christian in the world was a Jew.³

It will be some time before the first non-Jew believes in Jesus, and the initial forms that Christianity took were very Jewish.⁴

It was customary for devout Jews to go to God in prayer in the middle of the morning and in the middle of the afternoon. So, the two apostles, Peter and John, were simply continuing a custom of mid-day prayer they had followed all their lives as God-fearing Jews.

¹ The temple was located near the high spot within Jerusalem called Temple Mount. Hence, going *"up"* to pray.

² The ninth hour was the ninth hour after sunrise. Mid-afternoon.

³ Some may have been proselytes, Gentiles converted to Judaism, but they were still, religiously, Jews.

⁴ They believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. They would have thought of themselves as completely Jewish.

Since they were in Jerusalem, they went to pray in the temple.⁵

What happened as they approached the temple is a perfect example of the phenomenon of *convergence*.

If a fish and a fisherman converge at the same time and place, there may be fish for dinner.

If you hit the lights on Bandera Road just so, you and the green lights will converge all the way from 410 to 1604. That would be what we call a “miraculous” convergence.

Convergence came into play in the story we see today in that just at the time that Peter and John were arriving at the temple to worship, another man was arriving at the temple, but NOT to worship.

At the same time, a lame beggar arrives at the temple (vv. 2-3)

The disabled in ancient societies

This man was a beggar, and in the ancient world it was normal to see beggars sitting near the entrance to temples or shrines, asking for charity.

This man was physically disabled. Jesus frequently dealt with people who suffered from various disabilities, and He always treated them with dignity and kindness.

Peter and John had learned well from Jesus. They knew that those who suffer - physically, emotionally, mentally - are precious in God's sight.

They watched as this man was placed at the temple's Beautiful Gate.

This man's life (v. 2)

[2] And a man who had been unable to walk from birth was being carried, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful,⁶ in order for him to beg for charitable gifts from those entering the temple grounds.

We aren't told what caused him to be lame from birth. He may have suffered from other ailments. But it was his inability to walk that required him to beg.

He had never toddled, walked, or run. In the mainly agricultural economy of the day, there wasn't much work he could do. The only way for him to get by was by begging.

So, every day, he was carried to the temple to do the one thing he could do. He held out his hand, totally dependent on the charity of strangers.⁷

The arrival of those carrying this man to the Beautiful Gate converged with the apostles' arrival at the temple.

The scene we see (v. 3)

[3] When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple grounds, he began asking to receive a charitable gift.

So, what will Peter and John do? They're followers of Jesus, so we're certain that they will be kind. Certainly, they'll share what they have with this man.

And they did. But they didn't reach into their pockets for spare change.

⁵ Jesus modeled prayerfulness and taught His followers to pray. Prayer was an integral part of their life in Jesus from the start. So, it is to be for us, today.

⁶ There is no agreement on the exact location of what Luke calls here, “*The Beautiful Gate*.” In fact, no other reference can be found to the Beautiful Gate in

the Bible. It was at least a court large enough to hold the crowd that would soon gather. It was, perhaps, a gateway that led into the Court of the Women.

⁷ It is, perhaps, likely that Jesus had seen this man as He had walked into the temple precincts. If so, I wonder why Jesus did not heal him? When Jesus saw him, did He inwardly grin, knowing that his lameness was near an end?

Connection, at First Glance (3:4-5)

Peter commanded, "Look at us!" (v. 4)

[4] But Peter, along with John, looked at him intently and said, "Look at us!"

Notice this. They noticed him. They didn't ignore him. They didn't rush past him. They didn't throw coins at him. No. They looked right at him and spoke. ***"Look at us."***

By looking at him ***"intently,"*** they personalized him. I suspect that most of this man's encounters with those going into the temple were impersonal. This is different.

So, quick. What's going through the man's mind?

The lame man looked (v. 5)

[5] And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Obviously, he was expecting to receive money. He was ready to receive whatever money these two men have.

Maybe, given the personal greeting, he's hopeful that they'll give him a larger than normal gift. If that was his expectation, Peter's opening line would not have been encouraging.

A Miraculous Healing! (3:6-8)

What Peter can't give (v. 6a)

[6a] But Peter said, "I do not have silver and gold..."

Now, this is just an aside, but notice that Peter didn't say, ***"I do not have silver and gold ON ME."***

No. He said he didn't have any money. He was poor. The two leading apostles of Jesus didn't have money to give to a man begging at the temple.

But what they gave him was more precious than gold.

Peter gave the man what he had (vv. 6b-7)

[6]...but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!" [7] And grasping him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.⁸

So, the beggar's hand was probably already out, in hopes of receiving money. But instead of feeling the clink of coins, he felt the big, burly hand of a fisherman.

That hand pulled him to a place he had never been: Upright!

Miraculously healed!! (v. 8)

[8] And leaping up, he stood and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

This was a multi-layered miracle of healing.

- First, the parts of his body that were broken were fixed, just like that.
- Second, a life-time of muscular atrophy, instantly undone.
- Third, there was the miracle of walking and leaping. Lame from birth, he by-passed crawling and received instant coordination and agility.
- Fourth, there is the wonder of what has happened in this man's soul. He was moving under his own power into the temple, overwhelmed with gratitude to God.

This very public miracle, achieved by a direct word in the name of Jesus, was instantaneous, complete and permanent.

⁸ This is the first of fourteen miracles recorded in Acts, most of them performed by either Peter or by Paul.

And like a speedboat out on a lake, this miracle left behind a huge wake.

Impressions (3:9-10)

[9] And all the people saw him walking and praising God; [10] and they recognized him as being the very one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg for charitable gifts, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. [11] While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the portico named Solomon's, completely astonished.

This unnamed man had been a picture of human weakness. God chose to display His strength through the man's weakness.

As well, while Peter was a restored man who gave a powerful message on the Day of Pentecost, he's also the same man who denied knowing Jesus three times.

God has made out of Simon Peter this stunning trophy of grace. He enabled Peter to do what Jesus did - make the lame walk.

As you take next steps with Jesus, you'll see that God often uses people you would never have expected Him to use, to do things way out of proportion to their past or present to point to His power.

Here, God used two penniless apostles, one of whom had failed spectacularly to stand up for Jesus when the chips were down, and a man who had been disabled from birth to draw attention to Jesus.

At the beginning of this day, there wasn't a person in Jerusalem who was thinking, *"You know, I'll bet that if God is going to accomplish something of note today, He'll use that man who sits at the Beautiful Gate to the temple and begs every day."*

But that is exactly what He did. That is what He does.

We could probably come up with a biblical formula that shows how God works in inverse proportion to the strength of the person He's using. For instance -

- He used the teenaged David to bring down the giant Goliath.
- He pared down Gideon's army from thousands to a few hundred so everyone would know that Israel had won a military victory not by her own strength, but by His.
- He used Simon Peter, a former Jesus-denier, a man without formal training, a hick from the sticks, to deliver messages that resulted in the salvation of thousands.
- He used the healing of a man who had never walked to keep the fires of revival going in Jerusalem.

This is so important.

When God uses people who are strong, He does so despite their strength, not because of it.

His normal method is to work through weaklings and misfits, cracked pots and failures because they (WE) display His strength most gloriously.

The Apostle Paul embraced this central truth about life in Jesus.

When he wanted to describe the kinds of people God called and used, he mentioned, **[1 Corinthians 1:26] not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty.**

When Paul was pressed by the Christians in the church in Corinth to tell them something he was proud of, he told them about the time he was rescued from Damascus by being lowered over the city wall in a basket.

In other words, Paul's greatest boast was of the day he became a basket case for Jesus. (2 Corinthians 11)

God uses people nobody would expect Him to use. He brings players off the bench to make key contributions for eternity's sake.

So, if you have failed, as I have, rejoice. The club of failures is a big club. God still wants to use you, me, us.

If you are weak, like I am, rejoice. God delights to use us in our weakness to showcase His strength.

As you leave here today, leave with great hope. Enter this week with eyes wide open to weakness, human frailty and failure, disease and disaster, suffering and persecution, because it is in these situations that God is so often at work.

And it is here that we can join Him, ready to serve and to speak.

We saw last Sunday that the pattern of gospel progress was that of God taking initiative and His people responding. God works, then we speak.

That's exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost. It happened here, too. God worked a miracle of healing...so Peter spoke.

Peter Spoke Words of Life (Acts 3:12-26)

This Miracle Brought to You by FAITH IN JESUS (3:12-16)

"This miracle is not our doing." (v. 12)

[12] But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why are you staring at us, as though by our own power or godliness we made him walk?"

And then he waded right in with a bold, speak-the-truth-in-love message to these astonished onlookers.

This message was very similar to the message he gave a few days earlier at Pentecost.

"This miracle is God's doing, through Jesus!" (vv. 13-16)

[13] "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,⁹ the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. [14] But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,¹⁰ [15] but put to death the Prince of life."

Just like he did at Pentecost, Peter placed responsibility for the death of Jesus at the feet of this audience of Jews. (Acts 2:22-23 30-32)

Then, they ***[15]...put to death the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.***

Once again, Peter proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, with no fear of being contradicted because everybody knew that He was resurrected. (Acts 2:24; 3:15)

[16] 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."

And, again, Peter attributed this miracle of healing to God's work through Jesus. (Acts 2:15-21; 3:16) The reason the *lame* man was now the *leaping* man was because of faith in Jesus' name.

That's the first part of Peter's message. Here's part two.

Hastening the Messiah's Times of Refreshing (3:17-26)

The predicted - and predictable path of the Messiah (vv. 17-18)

[17] "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.

⁹ This name for God emerges on especially solemn occasions (1 Kings 18:36; 1 Chron. 29:18), as it underscores the covenant faithfulness of God.

¹⁰ Peter reminded them (just as he did at Pentecost) that they had asked that the murderer, Barabbas, be released instead of the innocent Jesus.

[18] “But the things which God previously announced by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has fulfilled in this way.¹¹

Everything Jesus did and everything Jesus suffered was predicted in the Old Testament. It was predictable - IF they were paying attention. But they weren't.

They missed the obvious clues that Jesus was the Messiah and therefore missed the Messiah.

Now, based on what we read in the next chapter about the impact of Peter's message, I think that Peter's audience was with him all the way, receptive, open.

They either saw or heard about the miracle. They knew that it was performed in the Name of and by the power of Jesus. They have heard Peter identify Jesus as the Christ.

By this point in the message, they have believed. So, Peter called on them to repent, just like he did on the Day of Pentecost.

Every person present was a part of a generation that had rejected Jesus.¹² They needed to reject that rejection, to repent of it.

At certain points during His life, Jesus had said that it will be better in the day of judgment for other notoriously evil generations¹³ than for the Jews of this generation because of the enormity of their sin of rejecting Him as the Messiah-King and His offer of a kingdom.

The repentance of these now-believing-in-Jesus Jews meant separating themselves from that generation's anti-Jesus stance, doing an about face, and publicly recognizing Jesus as Lord and Christ.

¹¹ Peter's comment here (“*you acted in ignorance*”) reminds us of Jesus' words from the cross, ***[Luke 23:34] “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”*** Also, Stephen's last words as he was being stoned to death for his witness for Jesus. (Acts 7:60)

[19] “Therefore repent and return,¹⁴ so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord [20] and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, [21] whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets from ancient times.

Then (vv. 22-25), Peter reminded his audience that Moses had predicted the coming of another prophet, like himself, only grander.

He reminded them that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham, and that, ***[26] “God raised up His Servant for you first, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”***

The crowd was with him, still listening. Peter was no doubt gearing up for the third part of his message. And poor Peter never got to give his conclusion.

That's because, while his audience was attentive and receptive, there were some there who were furious about what he had to say.

They brought Peter's message to a screeching halt.

In the Wake of a Miracle (Acts 4:1-4)

Jail Time (4:1-3)

Some VERY upset rulers! (vv. 1-2)

[1] As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, [2] being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

¹² See Matthew 23:33-36.

¹³ Sodom and Gomorrah, Matthew 10:15; Tyre and Sidon, Matthew 11:21-22; Nineveh, Matthew 12:41.

¹⁴ Note that in this message, Peter doesn't mention baptism.

This is an official arrest, carried out by official temple guards.

The men behind the arrest were Sadducees,¹⁵ and Sadducees were the aristocratic political animals of Israel. They valued national stability. Talking about Messianic hopes was destabilizing.

That's a big part of why they had opposed Jesus when He was alive. Jesus was talking about a kingdom, and that made Rome nervous, which made them nervous. So, they opposed Jesus.

Now that Jesus' followers were gaining an audience, for the sake of peace with Rome, they opposed the followers, too and they did what they could to stop Peter and John.

Overnight in jail (v. 3)

[4:3] And they laid hands on them and put them in prison until the next day, for it was already evening.

Don't miss this. Peter and John were put in jail for talking about Jesus after just having performed a miracle in Jesus' Name.

They were doing the right thing, the God-honoring thing. And God - who just proved His power by using the apostles to heal a lame beggar - did nothing to intervene as His servants were hauled off to jail.

My point in pointing this out is not to say that God couldn't have or that God doesn't sometimes rescue His people from trials and danger and suffering. He absolutely can and He sometimes does.

But I don't want us to miss that, here, He didn't.¹⁶

And while we're mulling on that thought, listen to what Luke tells us right after telling us that Peter and John were left overnight to cool their heels in jail.

They Believed...They Were Saved (4:4)

[4] But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.¹⁷

So, as sad and as unfair as their time in jail was, we now see the suffering of the apostles in context.

The amazing miracle of the lame beggar's healing was followed by the amazing conversion of lots more people.

Eternal destinies were changed. People found LIFE in Jesus and their lives were changed.

And the Sadducees learned that, just as they could kill Jesus but not really do away with Him, so they could arrest and jail apostles, but they couldn't cage the power of Jesus' message.

Conclusion: A trade-off of apostolic proportions

Here, I'll quote Richard Wurmbrand. Wurmbrand was a Romanian pastor who suffered terribly under the Soviet Union for his bold witness for Jesus.¹⁸

This quote is about how he viewed his treatment options - his trade-offs while serving prison time.

¹⁵ The Sadducees didn't believe in angels or demons or the after-life. (In fact, they believed that the messianic age had been ushered in during the days of Judas Maccabeus - so they weren't looking for a Messiah.) Thus, they had been upset when Lazarus was raised from the dead, as that event disproved their theology.

¹⁶ I wonder what was going through Peter's and John's minds on that night in jail. Were they confused? Did they believe that God had let them down? Did they ask God why He had allowed this to happen to them? Or were they at peace, as the text seems to indicate (Acts 4:19-20), given the number of people saved.

¹⁷ We don't know how many believers made up the church as of verse 4. Peter refers to five thousand men, without mentioning women and children, a not uncommon way to number crowds. (See the numbering of the crowds at the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand - Mark 6; Mark 8)

¹⁸ Wurmbrand wrote numerous books (including Tortured for Christ) and founded the organization, Jesus to the Communist World, which we today know as The Voice of the Martyrs.

"It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted [the communists'] terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy."

We started off this morning thinking about trade-offs.

Time or money. Speed or accuracy. You can have one or the other, but you can't have both.

Wurmbrand could have torture and beating while preaching in prison or not preach and not get beaten. That was his trade-off. He chose preaching and beating.¹⁹

I think that if we had the chance to interview Peter and John during their overnight stay in jail, they would have told us, *"What a great trade-off. We go to jail for preaching AND thousands are saved. We'll take that deal any day."*

They saw that there was something bigger going on here than what was going on with them. God was in it. He was working.

Jail time was worth it, if, by being jailed, people believed in Jesus through their message and received life eternal.

To which you and I say, *"Lord, give us the perspective of these apostles. Lead us to value the eternal souls of men and women more than we value our comfort, our convenience, our safety, our security."*

¹⁹ The Apostle Paul wrote to his younger brother in Christ, Timothy, [2 Timothy 0020fs3:12]...*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*