

Becoming Gospel-Centric

Acts 3:1-16

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Play IDOP video

Today we're giving attention to the persecuted church. Let's pray the persecuted will...

1. Sense God's presence (*Heb. 13:5*)
2. Know the greater body of Christ is praying for them (*2 Tim. 1:3*)
3. Experience God's comfort when persecuted (*2 Thess. 2:16-17*)
4. See God open doors to evangelism (*Col. 4:3*)
5. Boldly share the gospel (*Acts 4:29*)
6. Mature in their faith (*Col. 1:28-29*)
7. Be granted wisdom in covert ministry work (*Acts 9:23-25*)
8. Remain joyful amid suffering (*Acts 5:41*)
9. Forgive and love their persecutors (*Matt. 5:44*)
10. Be rooted in God's Word (*2 Tim. 3:16-17*)

Pray for the Persecuted

If you want to learn how to pray for the persecuted, we've posted four helpful resources on Sermon Extras, including the video we just watched.

In light of how so many Christians around the world are unable to gather together, I was humbled that approximately 700 people attended the Fall Festival of Fun on Thursday night! It was so packed it was difficult to move. At one point, all the parking spaces, included the 110 new spaces in our south lot were full! This event was multi-generational, multi-ethnic and many ministry contacts were made. One of our neighbors came and several Edgewood neighbors were here. I was pleased when a young boy in a wheelchair came and was able to use our new elevator to go to the lower level. One of my favorite comments was this, "*Wow, this place has changed since I was here last Easter!*"

When you see Sheila Kuriscak please give her props! If you served on Thursday night, can you raise your hand?

As we get ready to transition into our worship center, adult growth group space and the student center, it's good for us to be reminded of a couple things.

- **This is a place for people to meet with God.** Because it is, we want to treat the facility with respect. Listen to what happened when Solomon dedicated the temple in 1 Kings 8:10-11: *“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”*
- **This is a place for people to bring their messes.** As a result, things will get dirty, drinks will spill and items will break. The only way to have everything perfect would be for the building to remain empty of people. Proverbs 14:4 says: *“Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean...”*

Let's go back to the video we just watched. Incredibly, Pastor Han was able to share the gospel and disciple 1,000 North Korean believers! His ministry was primarily one-on-one, not to the crowds. He saw each individual as made in the image of God and therefore worthy of respect and in need of the gospel.

In our passage from Acts 3, we will see how Pastor Peter and Pastor John, while gathering for prayer, saw one person in great need. Verse 1 gives the setting: *“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”* The ninth hour is 3:00 p.m. These disciples of Jesus had very different personalities. Peter was a doer and motivator, while John was a dreamer and a mystic. Peter was outgoing and opinionated; John was an introvert and self-effacing. In spite of their differences, they both ran to the empty tomb and now they are prayer partners.

At the beginning of the Christian church, the first followers of Jesus were Jewish. It was natural for them to continue gathering for prayer in the temple at specified times.

Here's our main idea: *Look at every situation as a gospel opportunity.* It's been awhile since I've preached a first-person sermon so I'm going into character right now. I'll be back to share some application steps.

Imagine I'm the man described in Acts 3:2: "And a man lame from birth was being carried..." I encourage you to follow along in your Bible or on the app as I share what happened to me. The Scripture will also be up on the screen.

People called me Levi the Lame. I guess that's better than Lame Levi. I was unable to walk or run since birth because of a congenital condition. I was excluded from worship services because I was broken and blemished. Some thought I was cursed, that somehow my condition was a result of the sin of my parents or my own. I didn't have many friends and when I did go somewhere someone had to carry me.

When I was older some of my friends would carry me to the temple every day and place me right next to the most beautiful entrance. Actually, that's what it was called – the Beautiful Gate. The doors were made of Corinthian brass complete with exquisite carvings and detailed workmanship. I loved looking at the massive door but always felt ugly and unwanted next to this beautiful place. Frankly, I picked this spot because a lot of people went through this gate to pray. My hope was that they would be moved to toss me a shekel or two because they were thinking about God.

The last couple years were really difficult for me. I remember hearing Jesus teach at the temple. He healed a lot of my friends according to Matthew 21:14: "And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them." For some reason He never healed me. I was just Levi the Lame who stayed the same. This made me sad and mad. Why did He ignore me? Some of you know what it's like to be disappointed, discouraged and depressed. I didn't know what else to do so I just held out my hand and hoped for some help.

Most people walked right by me, as if I didn't even exist. I was used to being invisible because I was now in my forties and didn't think things would ever change (see Acts 4:2). One day, as I observed people coming to afternoon prayers, I thought I recognized two of the disciples – Peter and John. Just as they were about to go into the temple, I held out my right hand and asked for a handout.

I wasn't expecting what took place. It was typical for religious people to ignore me but when I looked up, the one called Peter was leaning toward me and we locked eyes. This never happened because most people dropped their eyes when they saw me. I noticed John was also gazing into my eyes with a look of love and

compassion. As I started to drop my eyes to the dirt, Peter gave me an abrupt command: **“Look at us!”**

I fixed my entire attention on them, anticipating some money. My day was starting to look up. But my hopes were dashed when Peter declared, **“I have no silver and gold...”** I was used to my dreams getting dashed so I started to turn away when I heard Peter say, **“...but what I do have I give to you...”** That got my attention so I wondered what he was referring to. I was totally unprepared for what he said next: **“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”** This came across as a command.

What? How could I rise up and walk when my legs were lame? Something came alive within me when he said the name of Jesus Christ, however. Then I felt Peter grip my right hand, the hand I used for begging, and he helped me stand up. In my culture the right hand represented honor, strength and blessings. My mind went to *Isaiah 41:13*: **“For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you.’”** Immediately my feet and ankles were made strong. He helped steady me as my atrophied muscles began working for the first time.

I can't even explain the joy that jolted through me as I leapt up like a deer in front of the Beautiful Gate. I couldn't believe it! I didn't even need physical therapy! I was so happy I started jumping up and down. Then a verse I had memorized as a young boy came to mind, and I remembered the lame leaping was a sign of the Savior's salvation. *Isaiah 35:6* says, **“Then shall the lame man leap like a deer!”** That was when I trusted Him as my Savior and Lord.

I started walking and immediately went into the temple to worship. For four decades I was begging on the outside but now I belonged on the inside! I hope you know the privilege you have to be part of a praising community! I'm sure you're here every week, right? It was unthinkable not to express my thanks to Jesus for this miracle. I continued walking and leaping and praising God. It was like the Holy Spirit was springing up within me and I couldn't contain myself!

I'll never forget how everyone started smiling and pointing at me. They all knew me because I sat in the same spot everyday and now I was Levi the leaper they laughed with joy. They knew what I was like before. So they were filled with wonder and amazement. They were utterly astonished, dumbfounded even...as was I. I'm sure some of them were skeptical; much like many of you are of Kanye

West's declaration that Jesus is King. But no one could deny Levi the Lame, a formerly paralyzed man, was now praising God.

I didn't want to let go of Peter and John because I had so much to learn. In the midst of people's astonishment, it was pretty incredible because hundreds of people started running toward us as we gathered for a spontaneous worship service in a place called Solomon's porch. I remembered Jesus teaching in this same spot as recorded in John 10 when He proclaimed Himself as the good shepherd. I was now one of His sheep.

*Peter popped up and tried to settle everyone down because many thought he and John had special powers. He used a title of respect for them and declared, **"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"** Peter was quick to say what happened was not because of their might or merit but only because of God's mercy. Peter and John were simply living out what Paul later recorded in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6: **"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God."***

*Then Peter linked the Lord Jesus to **"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."** It was this God, the God of our fathers, who glorified His servant Jesus. This title for Jesus comes from Isaiah 53, where the Messiah is not only called servant, but also substitute for our sins (I understand your pastor will be preaching on this chapter Christmas Eve).*

*Since Peter had their full attention at this point, he personalized the message for the listeners. I appreciated how he took the focus off of me and off of him and John. Look at verse 13: **"You delivered over and denied..."** In verse 14, the word "you" in the original is at the very beginning of the sentence: **"You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be delivered to you."** I could see the look on some of their faces because they were part of the crowd that demanded Barabbas be released and Jesus be crucified. In verse 15, Peter declares they are culpable for killing Jesus: **"And you killed the Author of Life."***

This might not be politically correct in your culture but there must be conviction of sin before there can be conversion. As Peter did all the time he proclaimed the resurrection and identified himself and John (and now me) as witnesses. Interestingly, the word for witness is where the word "martyr" comes from. As a result of my healing, persecution is about to break out on the young church.

In Peter's preaching he held up the importance of putting faith in the name of Jesus in verse 16: "And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

I'm going to come out of character now so we can seek to apply this section of Scripture to help us *look at every situation as a gospel opportunity*. Let's begin with some action steps for those of us who are born again believers. We'll conclude with an invitation for those who are not saved...yet.

Application for Believers

- 1. Cultivate joy that makes you want to leap.** Has it been awhile since you've allowed yourself to be moved by the mercy of God? Has a complaining spirit set up shop in your heart? Many of us could stand to smile more and speak less. Even if we don't leap on the outside, we should have the joy of Jesus on the inside. As a fellow pursuer of joy, join me in praying this prayer from Psalm 51:12: "***Restore to me the joy of your salvation...***"
- 2. Ask God to help you see people who are invisible.** Don't become so preoccupied with doing God's work that you miss God's will right in front of you. Remember in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, it was the religious guys who didn't stop to help in Luke 10:31-32: "***Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.***" God places people in our path on purpose. Ask God to open your eyes to see people in need. One look was all it took for Peter and John.
- 3. Minister as a team.** We were reminded last weekend that together is better. It's been wonderful to see so many jumping aboard Grow Time by giving of their resources. Others have been using their abilities to get our adult growth group space and student center ready. I'm reminded no one can do everything but everyone can do something. I love watching how the staff, deacon, and trustee teams all working together. I think of all those who came before us, most especially the ministry of Pastor Mel Brown and Barb who served here for 44 years! This weekend we have Craig and Lindsey

Stevenson with us. Craig was the youth pastor here for four years. Jesus understands the importance of teams when we read in [Luke 10:1](#): ***“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.”***

- 4. Reach out and help someone up.** God was at work in the lame man but he needed a believer to help him get up. Is there someone weak you can help this week? Where can you lend a hand? Maybe it’s serving as a tutor at Youth Hope or as a host for Safe Families. Our Edge Student ministry will be serving meals to the homeless at Christian Care on Saturday, November 9. [Hebrews 13:16](#): ***“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”***
- 5. Build gospel bridges by being contextual.** When Peter and John spoke to people who were Jewish they appealed to their background. Later, when Paul was in Athens, he built gospel bridges to their culture by quoting pagan poets. [1 Corinthians 9:22](#): ***“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”*** Look at every situation as a gospel opportunity.
- 6. Be bold about sin.** People need to know they are sinners before they will see their need for the Savior. Jesus didn’t come to improve our self-esteem but to solve our sin problem. [Proverbs 28:13](#): ***“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”***
- 7. Lift up the name of Jesus.** Let’s fill our conversations with references to the name of Jesus Christ. Talk about His life and His love. Tell others about His words: ***“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,”*** according to [Acts 4:12](#).
- 8. Speak often of the death and resurrection of Christ.** We’re called to be gospel-centric, to keep coming back to the core of Christianity – the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, exaltation and second coming of Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#): ***“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”***

9. Call people to put their faith in Jesus Christ. I like what Max Lucado writes: *“If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; if our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; if our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; if our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; but our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.”*

Let’s be like Peter and John and say, ***“But what I do have I give you...”***
Let’s call people to repent, to believe and to receive Jesus Christ. John 1:12 says: ***“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*** Incidentally, according to Acts 4:4, God used their boldness to save 5,000!

10. Don’t abandon new Christians to fend for themselves. Spend time with new believers and teach them the importance of gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel. After leaping with excitement, it’s easy to bottom out. We read that this man learned how to stand, to walk and to worship. 2 Timothy 2:2: ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*** One practical way to do that is to plug into a Sunday Growth Group (see insert in your bulletin)

Invitation to Be Saved

I want to speak now to those of you who have not yet been saved.

The Bible says everyone has been broken since birth. We are all sinners, spiritually lame and sitting outside the beautiful gate of Heaven. Your sin has paralyzed you, leaving you helpless and hopeless. It’s time to admit you are a chronic sinner and therefore guilty before a holy God. Some of us think if we only had more money we’d be better. The truth is money is not our greatest need; mercy is.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Beautiful Gate. Listen to what He said in John 10:9: ***“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”*** Will you repent and by faith receive Jesus Christ as your Savior right now so you can enter in? When you do, you will be saved and your

salvation will be immediate and instantaneous. If you're ready to do that, please pray with me. After the prayer I'm going to ask you to respond if you received Christ.

Lord, I admit I am a sinner and deserve Your just judgment. I'm a broken beggar and can't help myself. I know I'm outside the door but I want to come in. I repent from trying to follow my own way and now turn to You as the only way. I believe Jesus died in my place on the cross and rose again on the third day and now I receive Him into my life. Please save me from my sins and from Your righteous wrath. I want to be born again so I place all my trust in You and You alone. If there's anything in my life You don't like, please get rid of it. I pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who is both Lord and Christ. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and meant it, I wonder if you would have the courage to leap out of your chair right now?

Communion Transition

I'm told when Leonardo da Vinci finished his celebrated picture of the Last Supper, he asked a friend to inspect his work privately. After studying it carefully, his friend said, "*Exquisite! That wine cup seems to stand out from the table as solid glittering silver!*" Immediately the artist took a brush and blotted out the cup, saying: "*I meant that the figure of Christ should first and mainly attract the observer's eye, and whatever diverts attention from Him must be blotted out.*"

God gave us the ordinance of Communion to help us blot out everything that gets in the way of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

We're given three ways to prepare ourselves before taking communion.

1. Look up. *Verse 27 – “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”*

2. Look within. *Verse 28 – “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

3. Look around. *Verse 33 – “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”*

As we take the elements today, let’s be reminded communion is to be done in union with each other. The word communion means a “*common union*.” Hebrews 13:3 reminds us to not to forget those who are persecuted and mistreated around the world: “*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.*” Spend time praying for those who are persecuted.

The worship team will lead us in a song called, “All the Poor and Powerless.”