



***The Resurrection Power::***  
**“FILLED WITH HOLY BOLDNESS”**

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Scripture: Acts 3:1-10

*One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms.*

*Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.*

*Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

Last summer I heard a story I'd never before heard. It was about a man in a large city who was on his way to an interview for a new job with a highly successful company. Well-groomed, wearing a nice suit and smelling of expensive cologne, the man made his way to the corporate headquarters. As he was waiting for the elevator, an elderly janitor walked by, slipped on the wet floor and fell down awkwardly. The young man chuckled to himself at the slapstick humor, unconcerned that the old man might have been hurt. He stepped over the fallen janitor, boarded the elevator, went up to the 29th floor and entered the reception area of the firm.

Soon his name was called and he was ushered into a beautiful executive office. He was greeted by the woman who was going to conduct the interview. She was the company president. Immediately she said, “By the way, on your way up to see me, did you happen to see anyone who needed help?”

“Yes,” he replied, “an elderly janitor fell down right in front of me as I was waiting for the elevator.”

“Did you stop to help him?”

“Well, no. You see, I believe in promptness and the last thing I wanted was to be late for this very important interview.”

“Of course,” said the company president, “but you see, that was the interview. As a business executive, I know that many people try to push and shove their way to the top. But as a Christian, I believe that love is the most powerful thing in the world and that anyone who wishes to rank first must remain the last one of all and the servant of all. I’m very sorry, but I’m afraid you are not the person I have in mind for this position.”

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray, and a man lame from birth was being carried up to one of the gates of the temple to beg for alms. Most New Testament scholars believe that the “Beautiful Gate” cited here is the one known as the Corinthian Gate; it led from the Courtyard of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women at the Temple. Josephus the historian describes this gate in detail. It was made of Corinthian bronze. Its doors were forty cubits high and the gate itself, fifty cubits high. A “cubit” was the length of a forearm to the tip of the middle finger, from 17 to 21 inches. The historian Josephus says, “The gate was adorned after a most costly manner having much richer and thicker plates of gold and silver.” In the sunshine, the polished bronze, gold and silver were known to shine with spectacular beauty, hence it was called the “Beautiful Gate.”

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, this crippled beggar asked them for alms. And the disciples said a curious thing: “Look at us!” The disciples demanded his attention. He expected to receive some offering of money from them but Peter, possibly gesturing toward the silver and gold of the Beautiful Gate, spoke these amazing words: “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” Then Peter lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong, and leaping up he walked into the temple with them, walking, leaping and praising God. If this was some sort of test for Peter, I think he passed.

This account is not being told by Peter, however. It is told by the Apostle Luke. And for what was Luke known? He was called “the Physician.” Luke was a physician and he used medical terminology common to the physicians of that day. Here he uses the word *exallomenos*, “leaping up,” which is an ancient medical term for the socketing of the heel and ankle. The process, which would have taken corrective surgery and months of prolonged healing and re-learning to walk, took place in a split second.

Peter said to the beggar, “I give you what I have.” Not silver or gold; in the name of Christ, he gives the power to walk. “I give you what I have...” Peter sees a person’s need and responds to it. For many people the equation is very different. They ask: “What am I going to get out of this? What can this church do for me? Will I be rewarded with riches or health or status or safety if I believe? Will God prevent bad things from happening to me?” And the answer is “No.” The church will not make you rich or keep you healthy forever or prevent tragedy from happening. If given the opportunity, the church will certainly help you through your most challenging times.

Just look at Peter. He wasn't concerned with how he was going to benefit. He simply saw the need and gave what he had: he gave the man "Christ."

The question I feel this story asks of me today is "Do I dare to believe that God could work a miracle through me?" Can God work through you? Given that the Spirit manifests itself in abundant gifts and talents, do you believe that God can work good things, even miracles, through you? Peter, in holy boldness, dared to believe that the Spirit could work in him. And this scripture suggests that, through the grace of God, you and I can be miracle-workers as well.

Each of us needs to examine ourselves to see with what gifts God may have endowed us. And then, like Peter, we need to be bold in allowing the Spirit to work through us. But let me suggest that each of us can be a miracle-worker for God simply by using and giving "what we have" for Jesus Christ. Miraculous things happen not when we seek tremendous gifts, but simply when we offer our lives and the talents and skills we already possess.

Richard Leakey, the renowned archeologist who worked in northern Kenya, commented in his book, *People of the Lake*, about what separates human beings from the apes. He said it is not our intelligence, for apes are certainly intelligent. It is not our ability to be monogamous; apes have that as well. Nor is it our good looks. Apes believe they, also, are very attractive. What sets us apart from apes, Leakey says, is rather curious. It is our generosity. Our ability to be generous sets us apart. We are made in God's image, and we have a capacity to give, to share, to be generous. Jesus Christ came to make us truly human, human beings as God intended us to be, and God means for us to be generous persons. In community, we share with each other and with the world. Generosity, Leakey says, sets us apart from the animals.

We see this wonderful generosity all through the Book of Acts. It's what made them a community. The people of the early church shared what God had given them. What they had they gave, whatever it was—that's what made them a true community. That's what made them Christ's Church. They didn't even keep their possessions to themselves. They practiced something that scares most of us silly. They held all things in common because they were of one heart and soul. Can we say that? That because we are of one heart and soul, we will share what God has given us to share? When we reach that point, miracles will happen. When we can say "What I have is God's to use," miracles will happen.

When Rudolf Giuliani was the mayor of New York City, he used to do a radio call-in show on Saturdays. But you had to be careful what you asked, because Giuliani told it like he saw it. As you know, Rudy could be colorful. According to the *New York Times*, when a caller once questioned him about a police shooting, he said, "Either you don't read the newspapers carefully or you are so prejudiced you aren't willing to face the facts!" To another caller who questioned why it was illegal to fly the American flag from city buildings, he snapped, "Isn't there something important you want to ask me about?"

Yet another caller complained about the law prohibiting the keeping of pet ferrets in the city. At this the mayor of New York City leaned into his microphone and intoned: "There is something seriously deranged about you." He then launched into a three minute diatribe in which Giuliani told the man, "Things happen to people sometimes. Something has gone terribly wrong with you.

You should see somebody, a psychiatrist or a psychologist, someone who can help you with your problem. How are you seriously devoting your life to weasels?”

Well, people have seriously devoted their lives to less than weasels, poured their time and money and life force into a quest for status, or righteousness, or power or some similar pursuit, and even into simple vindictiveness and revenge. Which leads me to ask you this morning: to what are you devoting your life? What gets your time and talent and serious attention? Are you helping people “stand up”? I’m not asking about your diverse interests or occasional hobbies, but what you have set at the center of your life. What really makes your heart sing? Is it family? Career? Some type of power? An addiction? A dream? We need to think on these things. Because I think this passage asks, “Do you dare to give your life unreservedly to Jesus Christ?” Do we dare to do that? If we do, I think the boldness of the Holy Spirit will work freely within us.

Imagine what would have happened if Peter and John saw this poor man by the Beautiful Gate and said, “Hey, we’re a little short right now. We’ll catch you when we’ve got a little more in the bank!” Or, “Say, we’re in a hurry. Got to get into the temple!” Or what if they saw this crippled man and just turned their eyes away and pretended there wasn’t a need for their help? What would have happened? Nothing would have happened. Nothing. Nada. No miracle.

When we say “What small thing can I do?” or “What’s the least I can get away with giving?” it’s like saying that we will not share what God has given us. To paraphrase Richard Leakey, when we don’t share with generosity, we’re no different than the apes and other animals. In reality, we’re denying that we were made in the image of God.

In contrast, when our motivation is to respond to God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then the doorway to miracles is opened. If we truly seek God’s leading, we won’t worry about what anyone else is going to do. We won’t be bothered that maybe we’re doing more, or giving more, than our peers. That won’t even cross our mind. We won’t be anxious about giving more of ourselves than seems “reasonable.” And we won’t be resentful for what we do. For what counts is doing what is pleasing to God. That is the only motivation that will unlock the miraculous.

I think that’s where Peter found the boldness to tell that crippled man to “get up and walk!” Remember how cowardly he was when Jesus was arrested and people asked if he knew Jesus? Now, old Peter is changed. The Spirit of God is moving within his spirit and leading him to do what he had absolutely no reason to think that he could do. Peter saw a human need and he responded. He healed a man. No one saw that coming. Peter did what God led him to do, and gave what he had. He didn’t have silver or gold, or he would have given those as well.

Some time back, one of the educational channels carried an interview with the fellow who was retiring as Speaker of the House of Commons in London. The fellow’s name is Bernard Weatherill, and he had been in the House of Commons for 28 years, the last nine years as Speaker. Now, I don’t know if you ever flip over to C-Span in the middle of the night when they’re interviewing the Prime Minister in front of the House of Commons. Have you seen how they treat their Prime Minister there? They yell and scream and rant and rave and it’s the

Speaker's job to tell one to sit down and one to stand up and that one has a legitimate question and one is out of place. It's amazing.

I watched the interview. Weatherill had been asked to dress in all his regalia, and the British do this quite well. His wig was shoulder length. The robe he was wearing he described as being more than 150 years old. Speakers of the House had worn it for 150 years; it's passed from one to the other. Then he held up his shoes, and he said, "Look at this," and he had great gold buckles on his shoes. He said, "These gold buckles have been worn by the Speaker of the House for more than 150 years!"

The interviewer asked, "Well, what's it like to be in the House of Commons for 28 years?" And this is what the fellow said:

It was a frightening time to go into the House of Commons 28 years ago. The "Wall" had just been built in Berlin. The Americans had just had something they called the Cuban Missile Crisis. Khrushchev was saying he was going to bury the Free World. And I was sworn into the House of Commons. The day before, I was visiting with my mother, and she was talking to me about how proud she was to have a son about to enter the House of Commons.

"Your father was a great tailor," she said, "a really great tailor. He dressed some of Britain's finest. And he taught you how to be a tailor and you were one of Britain's very best. Tomorrow you enter the House of Commons."

Weatherill said:

Suddenly I'm thinking, "And just what is a tailor going to do there?" I mean, that really was my trade, and the trade of my father and that of my father's father before him.

And my mother reached over to my work bench and picked up my thimble. Every good tailor has a special one, this one given to me by my father. She said, "I want you to carry this with you, always, to remind you who you are—and what God can make of you."

The interviewer said, "So you wore it the next day?" Weatherill reached his hand down into the pocket of this 150-year-old ceremonial robe and brought out a thimble, saying, "I carry it every day, a reminder of what God has given—and what God could do with me."

When we give what we have, what wonders God can do. One usher, one Chair of the Board, one person working with men or women or youth, one committee member, one choir member, one church school teacher, one person living Christ's love in the work place; if we offer up whoever we are—and whatever we have—to the glory of God, what miracles God can do.

As our opening story illustrated for us, we may find that the interview for eternal life may not be what we achieve, but what we give. What we give out of the bounty of spiritual and material

gifts God has entrusted to us. It's not a matter of what we receive in return. What matters is whether we are Christian disciples following in the example of Christ's love.

If we simply give what God has given us, our church will be like that of the lame man who was healed. Using Luke's good word, we will *exallomenos*! We will leap up and dance! And we'll give the praise to God.

May we pray? Good and gracious God, you take enormous risks with us. You entrust us with amazing personal and spiritual gifts. You generously have blessed many of us with abundance far beyond our deserving. You simply ask us to "give what we have." Help us to be truly human and joyfully give what is in our hands. Today we ask your Holy Spirit to give us a new holy boldness, that we might become your church by daring to be the people you desire us to be: vital children of God. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.