

Encounter with Jesus – Crippled Man at Temple

In these services we are looking at people who have had an encounter with Jesus and the effect the encounter had on them. We have looked at several people who met Jesus physically during his ministry and last time at Bartimaeus, the blind man Jesus healed in Jericho. Tonight we are going to look forward beyond Holy Week to an encounter which happened after Jesus' death and resurrection - that of the Crippled Man at the Temple. Hilary is going to read us the story.

Acts 3:1-16 and 4:1-22

Who was the Crippled Man at the Temple?

We know even less about this man than the Samaritan woman or Bartimaeus. We are told he was crippled from birth and carried each day to the Temple to beg. There were hours of prayer at the morning and evening offerings; the time of prayer for the evening offering being mentioned here as about 3 pm. There would have been large crowds going into the Temple at this time, so it would have been a good time to beg. {Slide 1} The "Beautiful Gate" is believed to be the entry to the Court of the Women from the Court of the Gentiles on the east of the Temple. {Slide 2} Beyond it at the far side of the Court of Women was the Nicanor Gate, probably the main and largest gate, made of the most expensive bronze., facing the gate of the sanctuary, and must have been especially beautiful in the light of the rising sun. Situated above fifteen steps, beyond which neither women nor the maimed and unclean could pass, it was probably where the beggars sat on its steps to appeal to those going up into to the Court of Israel. Begging alms at public places was common in all societies at the time, although other cultures did not stress charity as the Jewish people did. In Judaism only those who could not work made their living this way, but charity was highly regarded, and the lame or blind would not have to go hungry, especially if they were near the temple. Congenital infirmities were thought harder to cure than other kinds and as we saw last week were often regarded as being the result of sin. The man would therefore have been on the edge of society and an outcast to all but family and close friends.

Although not recorded in the story, if he was carried there each day to beg it is possible that Jesus had passed him as he was going in and out of the Temple, maybe several times. We need to be careful not to make assumptions about God's purposes and timings. We are told in John 5 about Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda healing one man amongst the many who were waiting for the water to be stirred. God works in his own time and for the Crippled Man at the Temple his time wasn't until after Jesus' resurrection.

How did he encounter Jesus?

He initiates the encounter by asking Peter and John for money. Peter and John respond by looking at him and commanding him to look at them, i.e. ignore the other people going past who he was probably also asking for money. It could also mean "look at us" in the sense of seeing Jesus in them – some recognition of God's presence. Having got his attention, Peter tells him he doesn't have any money, but what he does have he will give him – the power of Jesus. Having simply spoken the words "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – walk" Peter grabs his right hand and helps him up – note he helps him, not pulls him up against his will, the crippled man was trying to stand showing he believed what Peter had said and was doing it - and instantly his feet and ankles become strong and he begins to walk, in fact he starts walking and jumping, probably dancing and running as well, and praising God. "In the name of Jesus Christ" as used here probably means "acting as his representative, I say to you" or "Jesus cures you". The man certainly met with Jesus through Peter and John who were filled with the Holy Spirit.

What happened during the encounter?

The obvious thing was that he was instantly physically healed of whatever disability he had had since birth, and we are told he was over 40 years old. However that wasn't all that had happened to him, he had also gone up the steps and into the Court of Israel – the first time in his life he could enter it because he was no longer crippled. He entered into his full inheritance as a son of Israel. He gave the glory to God and wouldn't let Peter and John go and made such a commotion that people from all over the temple came running to see what had happened. In fact it was such a commotion that it attracted the attention of the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees, who took a dim view of Peter and John preaching to the crowd about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead because they (unlike the Pharisees) didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. (Paul exploited this difference when he was brought before the Sanhedrin later in Acts.) As it was late they threw Peter and John in jail for the night and they were brought before the Sanhedrin the next day, a not unusual occurrence as we see it happen several times in Acts, the term "unlawful arrest" obviously didn't exist or apply then. The man who had been healed was also there, he would have been brought as a witness. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and states that the healing was "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead" – a bold statement to make in front of the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin, who did have the power to punish them (although not technically to put them to death, but later in Acts we see Stephen being killed by them for blasphemy). Peter then proclaims the gospel that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

What effect did the encounter have on the Crippled Man, the crowd and the Sanhedrin?

Ancient miracle workers usually prayed or invoked spirits rather than commanded the sick person to be healed. Peter follows Jesus' example and commands healing in Jesus' name – it is the power of Jesus that heals and not Peter. The issue for the Sanhedrin is therefore one of authority – whose authority were Peter and John acting under? Both the disciples and the priestly aristocracy recognize that there is no valid basis for a legal charge. Still, as custodians of the temple, the Sanhedrin had the police power to control teachings on what they consider their grounds. Some Jewish teachers argued that miracles by themselves would not validate someone's teaching if it did not accord with their own reasoning from Scripture and tradition. In particular however they recognised that Peter and John "were unschooled, ordinary men" who had been with Jesus. "Unschooled" means not trained in public speaking or debating, as the priestly aristocracy would be. (It could also mean that they were not trained under a recognized rabbi, if the Sanhedrin were too arrogant to count Jesus as a recognized rabbi.) But the reason for their "uneducated" boldness is obvious: they had been educated by Jesus, who was himself bold and "uneducated." (It was widely understood at the time that disciples regularly reflected the lifestyle and character they had learned from their teachers.) What the Sanhedrin cannot argue against is the man has clearly been healed and is standing (literally) in front of them. Despite their threats Peter and John tell them they must obey God rather than men and the Sanhedrin let them go. The effect of the crippled man's encounter with Jesus is therefore that many people, the Sanhedrin and the community of believers recognise the power (authority) of Jesus name.

Discussion – There are two challenges for us here which I would like you to discuss in your groups and we'll then have a short feedback from each group:

The Crippled Man met Jesus and his power in Peter and John. How well do we show Jesus to people we meet?

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit just as Peter and John were should we expect to see similar things happen?