

Acts

Acts 3:1-26 - What we can expect from the Holy Spirit

In **Acts Chapter 2** the Holy Spirit arrives with a bang, and the apostles immediately become powerful witnesses to the new world opening up because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

And their witness is **clearly visible** too. In **verse 43** the apostles do “many wonders and miraculous signs,” and in **verse 41** around three thousand Jews - speaking many different languages - very quickly become a close knit family. They meet and eat together every day “with glad and sincere hearts” (46), and the locals raise money, by selling their personal possessions, to feed and house the visitors (45). And no one's being told to do this either; they are doing it freely and gladly, because the Holy Spirit is now making **them** into clearly visible witnesses to this new world opening up too.

The scene then changes in **Acts 3:1**, to highlight one of the “many wonders” done by the apostles at this time. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, a traditional time of prayer for the Jews. A man crippled from birth was being carried to his usual daily begging spot at the temple ready for the crowds to arrive, which that afternoon happened to be the same entrance to the temple that Peter and John were entering at, so on seeing them the crippled man asked them for cash (verse 3).

Peter then did something I've never done when asked for money: he looked the man straight in the eye in **verse 4** and said, “Look at us.” But it tied in very nicely with being a visible witness to Jesus, because Jesus did the very same thing when accosted by people hoping for something from him. He directed their attention to himself first, because it was eyeball to eyeball contact that heightened their sense of expectation. A person wouldn't say, “Hey, look at me,” if he wasn't going to follow it up with something, right (verse 5)?

We're learning very quickly in Acts, then, that this new era of the Holy Spirit is not shy about expecting things from God. But it comes from realizing Jesus is simply continuing his ministry, because he often said to people, “According to your faith be it unto you” - meaning, “You **expected** something to happen, right? You saw me in action, and amazing things happened when people came to me. So you expected the same thing to happen to you too - and why not, pray tell, when it's obvious that this is what I do.”

And it was now the Spirit's job to give visible witness to Jesus STILL obviously doing it, and by the same means too, by heightening people's expectation of a follow up. It's like the author of Hebrews saying, "We see Jesus" in Hebrews 2:9, because Jesus wants our eyes locked on him, and for the same reason, in expectation that he will follow through every time with an answer we need. Why ask, in other words, if we don't expect an answer?

And here's the incident that illustrates that. By saying, "Look at us," Peter now had the cripple expecting something to happen, a definite follow up - a really nice wad of cash, perhaps. But in Peter's follow up we see that the Holy Spirit, and Jesus' continuing ministry, aren't into money handouts, or throwing great wads of "silver and gold" at a deep need to solve it. What the Holy Spirit does instead is draw attention to Jesus, because that's what the Spirit had been given for, to create a visible witness to him.

It was quite a surprise for the cripple, then, when Peter said, "It's not money I've got for you, but what I do have is this: In the name of Jesus the Christ of Nazareth, walk." And before the cripple even thinks of saying, "You must be kidding," Peter's already got him by the hand and helping him up, "and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong," **Acts 3:6-7**.

And notice how it hadn't required any faith on the cripple's part first. It wasn't even "according to his faith," therefore, that this incredible miracle had been done for him. But what the cripple did do was jump to his feet, discover the intense joy of actually walking for the first time in his life, and he kept on walking and jumping and yelling his thanks to God as he bounded into the temple alongside Peter and John.

As a visible witness it was priceless, because he was met with "wonder and amazement" (verse 10) as people recognized who it was making all that racket and bouncing up and down on fully formed legs. It was him: you know, the cripple we see begging every day. No, it couldn't be. But it was.

Astonishment spread through the crowd, creating a wave of people running to the spot in Solomon's Colonnade where the man, still jumping up and down, clung onto both Peter and John. It made it very clear that they were the ones who'd done this amazing miracle, but what was it all for?

Well, what it was all for is explained in the rest of Acts 3. The healing of the cripple was clear evidence that Jesus was alive and continuing his ministry of healing. And it was the Holy Spirit's job to make that real and make it visible, as a taste of what to expect from the Holy Spirit from that point on.

And it really is EXPECTING the Holy Spirit to do this too, because that helpless cripple pictures the state of our world perfectly, that there is nothing we humans can do about lifting the suffocating weight of endless physical and mental illness off ourselves.

It isn't for lack of trying to lift it, but the world's solution is much the same today as it was back then: it's money, just like the cripple begged the apostles for cash. It's what so many people turn to the churches for today too; they're looking to us mainly for material help. But we learn here in Acts that handing out money and physical help to people is not what the church is for. The help we've been called to give is what Peter and John gave to the cripple: it was a brand new life of healing, as visible witness to what Jesus is now doing. Jesus is changing and healing lives crippled by the "corruption" in every generation (Acts 2:40). Thanks to him we're now living in a new era in which men and women are being restored in the most amazing ways, which may include a bodily healing like the physical healing of the cripple, but far more important is the healing of crippled minds and broken hearts.

This is why, as Christians, we highlight "the name of Jesus," because he offers so much more than a helping hand or temporary physical relief. We help physically if we can, yes, just like the Good Samaritan did, but what if, like Peter and John, we can't help out with cash, or we can't afford a person's care until he's recovered?

Our minds don't go in that direction first anyway; we're thinking instead, "In what way will the Holy Spirit in me help this person best on their journey of healing and restoration to what God created us humans to be?" That's the business we're in now as followers of Jesus in this era of his ministry. It means, then, that we can expect the Holy Spirit to **make** us that kind of help to people, to fulfill our calling as visible witnesses to the healing Jesus has been doing in every generation, and now in our generation as well.

And note how this is pointed out right at the very beginning of this new age being opened up by the Holy Spirit, as we see again in Peter's reply to the astonished crowd: "Why," he asks in Acts 3:12, "are you gawking at us as if it was **our** power or godliness that enabled this man to walk?"

In other words, don't look at us (or the church) for this kind of help. Look instead to the great, living God who "glorified his servant Jesus," **verse 13**, "the Author of Life whom he raised from the dead," **verse 15**. "It's **totally because of him**," **verse 16**, "that this man is standing completely healed before you, **as you can all see.**"

Note Peter's last comment - that they could all "SEE." It was a truly visible witness that no one could deny, which set the tone for what to expect from the Holy Spirit from then on too, not only in the rest of Acts, but also in the continuing story of the church and Jesus' ministry today.

It made me wonder, therefore, if that's what I expect from the Holy Spirit in my life too - that not only am I "walking" (like the cripple) in areas of my life I was hopelessly crippled in before, but I'm also a visible witness of it to others so "they can see" it too, like the crowd seeing the healed cripple at the temple.

But isn't that what we pray "in the name of Jesus" for? That because of the trust the Holy Spirit has given us in the power of Jesus, we really do become visible witnesses to him. And not just hope to get an answer to such a prayer, but expect one too, because that's what we're in the church for.

I haven't thought much about this before, though, that the Holy Spirit will produce such undeniable evidence of healing and changes in my life that I can confidently ask a person, "So what do you say to that then?" - and expect a response in return, because who cannot respond to clear, highly visible evidence? The crowd at the temple "were filled with wonder and amazement." Armed, therefore, with that undeniable evidence we're then in a position to say to people, "Well, the same thing can happen to you too, you know; Jesus is just as interested in having you rise up and walk from your crippled state too."

Which is exactly what Peter is saying in the rest of Acts 3. Armed with the evidence of the healed cripple he goes on to say to those Jews that if they "turn to God" too, **verse 19**, the stuff and nonsense of their corrupt generation - which has crippled them since birth as well - "may be wiped out," and "times of refreshing may come from the Lord." And how will the Lord do that? **Verse 20**: he "sends the Christ, **who has been appointed for you - even Jesus.**"

Everything that Jesus is, therefore, has been assigned to us personally to heal and restore us. It is then the Holy Spirit's job **to make that visible in us personally**, so that people see in us the power of Jesus to heal and restore. And that may include physical healing too, but Peter emphasizes the main focus of our healing in **verse 26**, which is Jesus "turning each of you from your wicked ways" - or - setting us free from what has crippled us, just as he set that cripple free at the temple.

What we're seeing in Acts 3, then, is what we too can expect from the Holy Spirit; it's making us visible witnesses to the healing power of the living Jesus.