



Peter Preaching in the Portico (part 1)

Acts 3:12-19

1. The Pivot (verse 12)
2. The Power (verses 13, 16)
3. The Problem (verses 13-15)
4. The Plea (verses 17-19)

Many of us love tongue twisters. Those things that are difficult to say because they involve similar sounds. Here are a few of my favorites (try saying them out loud multiple times):

Sally sells seashells by the seashore.

How can a clam cram in a clean cream can?

If Stu chews shoes, should Stu choose the shoes he chews?

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

My message this morning is a bit of a tongue-twister as well. It's this: "Peter Preaching in the Portico." I could have made it much longer. I could have entitled it, "Peter Passionately Preaching the Power of the Prophet to the Praying People in the Portico."

Last week we looked at Acts, chapter 3, the entire chapter. It breaks up nicely into two parts. The first part is when Peter heals the lame beggar. I called that, "The Miracle." The second part is when Peter preaches to those in the temple. I called that, "The Message."

Last week, we spent a lot of time looking at "The Miracle," and only a little time talking about "The Message." This week, I want to reverse that. I want to spend a little time looking at "The Miracle," and then most of our time looking at "The Message." The time we will spend looking at "The Miracle" will be just enough for us to set the context of the Message. So, let's go.

Chapter 3 begins in verse 1 with Peter and John heading up to the temple to pray. Upon approaching the Beautiful Gate, as verse 2 tells us, they encountered a beggar, who had never walked, but was lame from birth. This man had been placed there by his friends to beg. In verse 3-5, we see him asking Peter and John for some money. They have some eye-contact. The beggar is expecting to receive some money from Peter and John. Then come the famous words in verse 6, ...

Acts 3:6

Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

The apostles, in their day, simply had the power to do what we, in our day, cannot do. Peter take the hands of an invalid, and make him walk for the very first time (verse 7). In fact, the man didn't simply walk, he got airborne! (verse 8). For those of you who were here last week (or watched online), you missed the action, as I tried to give you a little feel of what it was like to see this man healed. I went airborne on the stage. (In talking with some of you this week, I know that several of you were impressed with my hops. I still got it!)

I'm not sure many of you will ever forget the scene. That's my goal: That you would remember the miraculous nature of what Peter did. He took a man who had never walked before, and if basketball would have been around in the day, he may have been able to dunk.

I wish that we were able to do such today. We would put orthopedic surgeons out of business. We would free up hospital beds for those with COVID. We would see those who are healed joining the chorus of praise to our God!

I'm reminded of the famous story of Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Roman Catholic Theologians. He lived in the 13th century, a long time ago. The story goes that he was visiting Pope Innocent IV in Rome. The pope was showing him the mass of treasure and riches that were there in Rome. He said to Aquinas, "You see, Thomas, we cannot say as did St. Peter of old, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Thomas Aquinas replied, "No indeed. But neither can you say, as did he, to the lame man, ... 'rise up and walk.'"

In Peter's day, this man did rise up and walk. It caused quite a commotion. We read in verse 10 that the crowds "were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to [the lame man]."

In verse 11, we read that he "clung to Peter and John." What a scene. Here was this healed man, holding on to Peter and John like a child in

a busy crowd who doesn't want to lose his parents. They had changed his life. He didn't want to let them go. We read that "all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's" (Acts 3:11).

Peter begins to preach in verse 12. He preached in a place called "Solomon's Portico." It was a place in the temple with stone columns and a roof. We don't know its exact location, as the temple was destroyed in A. D. 70, just as Jesus had predicted (Luke 21:6). We simply know that this was a area on the Temple Mount someplace that was dedicated to Solomon. From what Josephus, a Jewish historian around the time of Christ, said, it was probably on the east side of the temple. It is often referred to as "Solomon's Porch." It was a large place, enough for many people to gather. It was along the edge of the Temple Mount, far away from the sacrificing activity of the Temple.

It was a great place to preach a sermon. That's exactly what Solomon did. And that's what my message this morning is focused upon, Peter's Preaching at Solomon's Portico. This is where I get the title of my message this morning, "Peter Preaching in the Portico." Let's consider Peter's sermon:

Acts 3:12-26

"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? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 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.

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

Last week, I mentioned how similar this sermon is to the sermon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost (which is in chapter 2). Yet, they are very different. One commentator puts it this way, ...

Peter's sermon in Solomon's [Portico] is in many ways similar to his sermon at Pentecost (2:14-41). Structurally, both move from proclamation to a call for repentance. The Pentecost sermon, however, is finished and polished, whereas this one is comparatively roughhewn. Thematically, both focus on the denial and vindication of Jesus of Nazareth. But the [Portico] sermon expresses more of a remnant theology than the one at Pentecost. It shows a more generous attitude toward Israel, coupled with a greater stress on the nation's responsibility for the Messiah's death, than does the Pentecost sermon; and it makes explicit the necessity of receiving God's grace by faith.^[1]

All of that to say, that there are similarities between these sermons, but they are very different. The sermon at Pentecost was very organized. Peter begins by mentioning tongues as the fulfillment of Joel 2. Then, Peter speaks about the life of Jesus, referring to Psalm 16. He transitions to Psalm 110 and concludes with a clear call to repentance. Our sermon this morning, on the other hand, is much more jumbled with many of the same themes.

One might easily say that the Pentecost sermon is organized and logical, much like our western minds like it, while the Portico sermon represents eastern thought, which is more holistic and circular. As a result, an outline of Peter's portico sermon is difficult. Yet, I will try. Let's begin with ...

1. The Pivot (verse 12)

Last week, I mentioned to you about how Peter turned the conversation from the miracle to the message, just like he did on the Day of Pentecost from the tongues phenomenon to preach about Jesus. He is the one who "has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:33). In other words, the tongues phenomenon is because Jesus is exalted and has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to us!

This transition, I called this, "the pivot." Just like a basketball player, who is going one way, but stops and pivots to turn the other way. This is exactly what Peter does in verse 12. He assesses the crowds and their wonder at the miracle of the lame man who had just been healed. And he takes what they are thinking and pivots to the power behind the miracle.

Acts 3:12

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?

Then, Peter pivots to talk about how the miracle was done. It wasn't the power of Peter. It wasn't the power of John. It wasn't the piety of Peter. It wasn't the piety of John. It was God, alone who worked the miracle. That's who he begins speaking about in verse 13, ...

Acts 3:13

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus.

It's through his power that has made this man well. Verse 16 is a bit more precise. It's through faith in Jesus that has made this man walk.

Acts 3:16

... the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Regarding the pivot, I encouraged you all to make the same pivot in your conversations. This week, I attempted a couple pivots, I don't think I was so successful, but I tried.

The first came on Monday, when I was giving blood. Everything was hooked up. I was squeezing the ball in my hand. Blood was flowing into the bag. We were just waiting there. I was watching the clock tick by. The nurse was watching my blood bag fill up. She broke the silence, by asking me if I had any plans for the day. I said, "I'm a pastor of a church. I pour myself out each Sunday. Monday is my day off. So, I'm doing 'day-off' sorts of things, projects around the house, reading, time with the family." I waited for the follow-up question, "Oh, really? What church?" It's then that I often have an opportunity to continue on. But she said nothing. I tried to pivot the conversation, but it didn't much work.

My second attempt to pivot a conversation toward Jesus took place on Wednesday, when Yvonne and I were out for a walk. We happened to see a neighbor of ours. I know that he works second-shift, so it was strange to see him at home in the afternoon. So I said, "I thought you were supposed to be at work at this time?" He said that his aunt died recently. The funeral was yesterday. He was taking time off today with family in town. I know that his uncle died tragically a year ago. He told Yvonne and me how different the funerals were. Her uncle led a wicked life and his funeral was very depressing. But his aunt went to church frequently and so, it was a very uplifting experience, thinking about her being in a better place.

I then quoted from 1 Thessalonians 4 about how believers in Jesus don't have to grieve as those who have no hope, because they have a hope of being with Jesus for eternity. He really didn't pick up on that too much. The conversation ended soon afterwards. But I was trying to pivot. The conversation amounted to a little, but not too much.

My third attempt to pivot a conversation this week took place on Thursday evening. We have been trying to give our couch away. It sat outside for a few days. Nobody was biting. So, on Thursday evening, we took it inside. Fifteen minutes later, a car drove up and saw Yvonne working on something outside. The person in the car asked about the couch. We said that we just brought into the garage, but it is still available. Then the guy explained what was happening (which was all confusing), but I thought that he said he was moving into our neighborhood from Mount Morris. His son was involved somehow. Anyway, he planned to come back later that evening with a pickup. "Aha!" I thought to myself. I know some people from Mount Morris. My daughter married a man from Mount Morris. We pray for a church in Mount Morris often. I know a good handful of people at the church. I can try to pivot with these people, Telling them of how I know some people at the Evangelical Free Church there. Perhaps there would be A connection. Perhaps hoping that they might be looking for a church.

So when they came to pick up the couch, I said, "Did you say that you moving here from Mount Morris?" He said, "No." We just live a block over. They have lived there for several years. Then we talked about his house, never again talking about Mount Morris. It was in my heart to try to pivot to spiritual things. It just didn't work.

I would encourage all of you to do the same. Try to pivot to spiritual matters in your conversations. You say, "How do I do that?" I think that the best way is to have it on your mind. One of the greatest illustrations of this that I know is Charles Spurgeon, lecturing his students. He says this, ...

I shall never forget the manner in which a thirsty individual once begged of me upon Clapham Common. I saw him with a very large truck, in which he was carrying an extremely small parcel, and I wondered why he had not put the parcel into his pocket, and left the machine at home. I said, "It looks odd to see so large a truck for such a small load."

He stopped, and looking me seriously in the face, he said, "Yes, sir, it is a very odd thing; but, do you know, I have met with an odder thing than that this very day. I've been about, working and sweating all this ere blessed day, and till now I haven't met a single gentleman that looked as if he'd give me a pint of beer, till I saw you."

I considered that turn of the conversation very neatly managed, and we, with a far better subject upon our minds, ought to be equally able to introduce the topic upon which our heart is set. There was an ease in the man's manner which I envied, for I did not find it quite so simple a matter to introduce my own topic to his notice; yet if I had been thinking as much about how I could do him good as he had upon how to obtain a drink, I feel sure I should have succeeded in reaching my point. If by any means we may save some, we must, like our Lord, talk at table to good purpose yes, and on the margin of the well, and by the road, and on the sea-shore, and in the house, and in the field.^[2]

There is (1) The Pivot (verse 12). When Peter pivoted, he pivoted to talk about ...

2. The Power (verses 13, 16)

Peter talked about the power behind the miracle. And the power is God. You see this in verse 13, ...

Acts 3:13

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus.

The significance of the reference to God as "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," is that this is the God of the promise. God made a promise to Abraham, to make his name great, to bless all of the families of the earth through him." God repeated the promise to Isaac. God repeated the promise to Jacob. So, a reference to "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" is to indicate that Israel was the nation of God's promise.

Peter identifies the source of the power of the miracle as the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Peter identifies the source of the power of the miracle as the same God to whom Elijah pleaded on Mount Carmel, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). This is the God of the patriarchs! This is the God of the promise! This is the God of power! He's the one who gets credit for giving this man the ability to walk.

Ultimately, the power lies in the name of Jesus. Look down in verse 16, ...

Acts 3:16

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.

It's a convoluted sentence, consistent with this jumbled sermon of Peter. But its meaning is clear. The power comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It's by faith in the **name** of Jesus Christ. Now, it's not that there is some magic in reciting the "name" of Jesus. "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." But the name is representative of his person and his power. That's why Jesus told us to pray, "in his name" (John 14:13-14). That's why Peter invoked the name of Jesus in the very act of the miracle, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

It's the only name under heaven that can heal. It's the only name under heaven that can save. In a week or two we will look at Peter's statement to the Jewish counsel affirming this fact, "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" (Acts 4:12). The power of the miracle was Jesus Christ.

The question here in this miracle is "whose faith is it?" The text says nothing about the faith of the beggar, who was pleading for money. He wasn't like the blind beggar beside the road in Jesus day, who heard that Jesus was passing by. So he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Even when the bystanders were trying to quiet him down, he cried out all the more, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He had clear faith in Jesus as the one with the power to restore his sight. Not so this lame man. When Peter came walking by, he was asking for money, not for healing.

So, "whose faith is it?" It's certainly Peter's faith. Peter believed that the power of Jesus Christ flowing through him could make this man walk. And walk he did. The evidence is irrefutable, as the formerly lame man was right there, at the feet of Peter, clinging to him. But there was a problem for the audience that day. This is my next point:

3. The Problem (verses 13-15)

The problem was this: the Jews had already rejected the source of the power of the miracle. They had rejected Jesus. This is what Peter brings up in verses 13-15.

Acts 3:13-15

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

The Jews didn't merely ignore Jesus. The Jews didn't merely tolerate Jesus. The Jews didn't merely bear up the strangeness of Jesus. No, they rejected Jesus. They "delivered him over" to Pilate (verse 13). They "denied" that we have their Messiah (verse 14). They "asked for a murderer" instead of their Messiah (verse 14). They "killed the Author of life" (verse 15).

I trust that you remember the scene. It was Passover. Many Jews had gathered in Jerusalem for the week-long festival. During the week, Judas had come to the chief priests in those days (Matt. 26:14). He promised to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), which he did, there in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47-50).

With Jesus in custody, it was finally the chance for the religious elite to see this menace finally destroyed. They held a mock trial, (Matthew 26:57-66) and found him guilty of blasphemy, deserving of death (Matthew 26:66). But the Jews in that day had no authority to put someone to death. So, they brought Jesus to the one who had the power of execution: Pontius Pilate.

Pontius Pilate took Jesus into his quarters and began his own trial of Jesus. As Pilate questioned Jesus, he didn't understand what was taking place. He saw Jesus as a meek and unassuming man. Jesus stood before him in relative silence, not trying to defend himself against the accusations of the Jews.

Pilate's verdict was that he was innocent. And so, he tried to release him. Every Passover, it was the custom for the governor to release a prisoner. Pilate figured that this would be his out. He would "release" Jesus for them. But the crowds demanded that Pilate release Barabbas, a "notorious prisoner" (Matthew 27:16), who was in prison "for an insurrection started in the city and for murder" (Luke 23:19).

They wanted Barabbas to be released. They demanded that Jesus be crucified. Pilate said, "Why, what evil has he done?" (Matthew 27:23). But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" (Matthew 27:23). Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere. Rather, he saw that a riot was breaking out. So, he gave in, seeking the peace over justice, but not without making his position clear. He took out a basin of water. He washed his hands in front of them all. He said, "I am innocent of this man's blood" (Matthew 27:24). The Jews in the crowd that day said, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). And that's exactly the problem: his blood was upon them. They were guilty of rejecting Jesus, the very one who had the power to heal this lame man.

Look again at verse 13, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus,

whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him." Pilate's declaration of his innocence were not enough to convince you.

Verse 14, "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you." You chose Barabbas, the insurrectionist, over Jesus.

Verse 15, "and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead." You bit the hand that fed you. And now you are in trouble.

Verse 15, "To this we are witnesses." It's clear to all.

But there was hope. This comes in verses 17-19, which I am calling, ...

4. The Plea (verses 17-19)

This is where Peter puts forth the call to repentance. He says, ...

Acts 3:17-19

And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

Now, again, we see that this sermon was unique in the fact that the listeners were actually in the crowd when Jesus was crucified. They were the very ones who cried out to Pilate, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Yet, Peter cuts them some slack. He said, "I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers."

If you had truly known who Jesus was, you would have crucified him. This sentiment is repeated by Paul, "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). They didn't fully understand what was going on. Their rulers didn't fully understand what was going on. They didn't understand the prophets. "God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer" (Acts 3:18). This verse is so expansive. It speaks of "all the prophets." It speaks of their prophecies of the suffering servant, who must suffer in our place. These prophecies came true. They were "fulfilled."

The only way out is found in verse 19, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out." This is essentially the same message that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. When his listeners realized what they had done, in rejecting and killing their Messiah. Peter told them to "Repent" (Acts 2:38). This comes with a promise (as did the sermon on Pentecost). It comes with the promise of forgiveness, "that your sins may be blotted out."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 22, 2020 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Richard Longenecker, Expositor's Bible Commentary, pp. 295-296.

[2] Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, pp. 171-172.