

Sunday, May 18, 2025 | Filled

Week 8 | Acts 3:1-10 | “A Celebrity Conversion”

READ: Acts 3:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.

³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.

⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But 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!” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

All conversions to Christianity are miracles, but some are more publicized than others. For instance, several celebrities have made their profession of faith public (e.g., Alice Cooper, Brian Welch, Justin Bieber, Bear Grills, Russell Brand, Kat Von D, and so many more). Admittedly, we must be discerning when *any* famous person claims to be a follower of Christ. As a Russian proverb puts it, “Doveray no proveryay,” or, “Trust, but verify.” All that glitters is not gold (e.g., Kanye West).

Additionally, even when there is a *genuine* conversion, we mustn’t put Christian celebrities on a pedestal. Notoriety and integrity are rare bedfellows. Just because someone has a platform doesn’t mean they have the right to speak into your life. A new Christian is one of the *worst* places for sound theological truths. This is why new converts should *never* be placed in any authoritative role in the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6). They need time to mature and to undergo examination (cf. Gal. 1:18).

Setting those concerns aside, it is wonderful to see someone who was once the poster child for darkness become a beacon for light. And, interestingly, celebrity conversions are not new. John Chrysostom, a fourth-century church father, talks about how a woman named Pelagia, known

throughout the Mediterranean world as an actress and prostitute, became a Christian. Chrysostom says, “[Pelagia] ended her life, having washed off all through grace, and after her baptism, having shown great self-restraint. For not even a mere sight of herself did she allow to those who were once her lovers...Let no one then who lives in vice despair; let no man who lives in virtue slumber.”¹

In today’s passage, someone like a celebrity comes to Christ. And though he is known more for his disability than his abilities, God uses his reputation for gospel glory. Indeed, whether we’re renowned or unknown, should we point people to Christ, God can use our name to accomplish great things for his name.

I want you to notice three things:

i. Vs. 1-3 – A Poor Beggar

Vs. 1 – Luke tells us that “Peter and John” were on their way to “the temple at the hour of prayer.” Corporate prayer was a big part of Jewish life (cf. Dan. 6:10-28). There were three prescribed times in Judaism: Shacharit (morning), Mincha (afternoon), and Ma’ariv (evening). This corresponded with the daily sacrifices in the Temple. The “ninth hour” would equate to 3PM by our reckoning. This means the apostles were coming for the midday prayer. As we mentioned last week, it was an integral part of the Christian life. So much so that the *Didache*, a second-century handbook on Christian practices, advises the believer to pray three times a day, morning, afternoon, and night (*Didache* 8:3). Christians should be a praying people, just as, if not more so, than the Jews. Interestingly, prayer is a common theme throughout the book of Acts, being mentioned at least **30 times**: 1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:31; 6:4, 6; 8:15, 22, 24; 9:40; 10:2, 4, 9, 30, 41, 48; 11:5; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:9, 13, 16, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8. Whether we find believers meeting together or something miraculous happens, prayer is almost always mentioned in the context.

Vs. 2 – Luke tells us that “a man lame from birth was being carried.” At the end of the next chapter, we learn that this man was forty years old (cf. Ac. 4:22). **Given that Jesus was no stranger to the Temple grounds, it's not unreasonable to assume that he had either heard or seen the Lord.** Regardless, for over four decades, this poor man had never moved without some kind of help. He had to rely on others for everything. In fact, he was at the Temple that day not to pray, but “to ask alms of those entering the temple.” And this, we’re told, was a “daily” occurrence. Presumably, this is something he’d done for most of his life. So much so that, as

¹ Chrysostom, John, *Thee Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Vol. 2, (Jazzybee Verlag: 1844), p. 231.

we'll soon learn (cf. vs. 10), he became something of a fixture in the Temple. He was as recognizable as the gates themselves!

Every day, he'd get some friends or, perhaps, a couple of family members, to carry him up the Temple steps, and he'd be placed at the entrance. But the spot he chose was special. He begged outside "the Beautiful Gate." Though it is hard to say with certainty, this gate is likely equated with the Nicanor Gate. "The Beautiful Gate" was called "beautiful" because it was ornately decorated, mostly comprised of bronze imported from Corinth.² Coincidentally, this is why it was also called "the Corinthian Gate." A late first-century Rabbi said about the Nicanor Gates, "[The copper] illuminated its surroundings like gold."³ Josephus, in *War* 5.201, says of the gates, "Nine were completely overlaid with gold and silver, as were also their door-posts; but one, that outside the sanctuary, was of Corinthian bronze, and far exceeded in value those plated with silver and set in gold." It separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of Women.⁴ The entrance was the biggest of the Temple's nine gates, standing 50 cubits (75 ft) high and 40 cubits (60 ft) wide.⁵ It had to be large because it was likely one of the main thoroughfares into and out of the Temple.

Being something like Main Street on the Temple grounds, it should come as no surprise that (1) this beggar posted up at this location and (2) that he saw Peter and John entering the Temple. Luke tells us that upon "seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms." Before the apostles saw him, the lame man saw them and decided to ask them for money. We're not told if the beggar knew Peter and John. It's possible but unlikely. Nothing in the text suggests either party was acquainted with the other.

So, what's the takeaway? Chance meetings are divine appointments.

Never be so task-oriented that you miss a gospel opportunity. A daily routine is the perfect playground for accomplishing kingdom objectives. In John 4, we're told that, though he could've gone by a different road, Jesus "had to pass through Samaria" (Jn 4:4). Why? Because he had an appointment to keep. He was going out of his way to meet a woman shunned by all. And through her, an entire town would be reached for the kingdom of God.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Beautiful Gate](#)," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 272.

³ R. Eliezer b. Jacob, Yoma 38a.

⁴ Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2007), p. 160.

⁵ P.C.J., "Gate, Beautiful," *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, & John Rae (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, 1975), p. 656

Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, was saved under the preaching of an unknown layman on January 8th, 1850. He was 15 years old at the time. Listen to how Spurgeon tells this story:⁶

"I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, when I was going to a place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a court and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel, there might be a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning: snowed up, I suppose. A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say. The text was, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth' [Isa 45:22]. He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text.

He began thus: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, "Look." Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just "look." Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; a child can look. But this is what the text says. Then it says, "Look unto Me." 'Ay,' said he, in broad Essex, 'many of ye are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You'll never find comfort in yourselves.' Then the good man followed up his text in this way: 'Look unto Me: I am sweating great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hanging on the Cross. Look: I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend; I am sitting at the Father's right hand. O, look to Me! Look to Me!'

When he had got about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. He then said, 'Young man, you look very miserable.' Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before. However, it was a good blow struck. He continued: 'And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.' Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, 'Young man, look to Jesus Christ.' There and then the cloud was

⁶ Taylor, Justin, "How the Snowpocalypse of 1850 Led to Spurgeon's Conversion 164 Years Ago Today," January 6, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/charles-spurgeons-conversion-in-a-primitive-methodist-chapel/>, [accessed May 16, 2025].

gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ.”

God is often to be found in the most unexpected places. For it is there, where we least expect to find him, that we learn we are most loved. Though all seem to have forgotten us, the Lord knows, sees, and loves us.

ii. Vs. 4-7 – A Poor Apostle

Vs. 4 – Most people, when they see a homeless person, avert their eyes, either because the sight is too sad or, more likely, they don’t want to feel bad for ignoring them. Some homeless people will not even want to make eye contact as they’re begging for money, either because they’re embarrassed or, more likely, because they do not want to be disappointed when they’re ignored. Whatever the reason, looking away minimizes those kinds of feelings. But these apostles were different. Luke says, “Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” The apostles didn’t want to avoid eye contact; they wanted it.

Vs. 5-7 – We’re told the lame beggar “fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.” But instead of receiving money, he gets something far more valuable: the use of his legs. Peter says to him, “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!” Then Peter took the poor by “the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.” I cannot help but assume that Peter had to even take the man by the hand because the beggar didn’t believe him. This miracle will be the catalyst for Peter’s second sermon in Acts, providing credibility to his words.

So, what’s the takeaway? Christianity restores humanity’s dignity.

These apostles looked at, talked with, and touched this beggar. And while we may not have the gift of healing, as Peter and John did, every Christian has the ability to treat every person with dignity. The physical healing of this lame man was a sign that spiritual healing was available to all “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” Towards the close of Peter’s sermon, he’ll tell the people, “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” (3:19-21).

The minimization of human life is one of the devil's most significant achievements; it's demonic. The poor, marginalized, and discarded ought to be treated with respect in church because Christ has taken the spiritually poor, marginalized, and discarded and made them joint heirs

with him in God's kingdom (cf. Rom. 8:17). All human beings made in the image of God, and, as such, have immeasurable value (cf. Gen. 1:27). Hospitals, adoption, foster care, women's rights, the education system, science, the abolition of slavery, the US constitution, and declaration of independence, just to name a few, are all biproducts of Christianity.

The greatest force for good in this world is Christianity. In his book *Dominion*, Tom Holland, a British Historian and atheist, lays out how the West's conception of "good" is directly connected to Christianity.⁷ Without it, there'd likely be no West and no "good" as we'd know it today. Even Richard Dawkins, arguably one of the most famous atheists in history, self-identifies as a 'cultural Christian'.⁸ Why would such unbelievers say such a thing? Such a mindset seeks to love God with one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Such a mindset radically transforms lives.

You may not have wealth, but if you're a believer, you are rich in the Lord. You may not feel like you have anything to give, but if you're a Christian, you can introduce others to Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all.

iii. Vs. 8-10 – A Rich God

Vs. 8 – Listen to Luke go into great detail, describing the lame man's reaction. He was "leaping up...stood...began to walk.... walking and leaping." This man was getting full use of his new legs. And through all the movement, he was "praising God." Being able to stand, walk, and leap after being lame since birth warrants celebration. So much so that he could not help but worship God.

Vs. 9-10 – Such a commotion wouldn't go unnoticed. Luke says, "All the people saw him walking and praising God." Everyone there that day at the Temple was a witness to this miracle. And no one would think this was the result of human ingenuity; it was the product of divine authority. This man was making a scene, walking and worshipping God.

Not only that, Luke says, but the people "recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms." As we said earlier, this lame man was as much a fixture of the Temple as the Temple gates themselves!

⁷ To be clear, Holland doesn't think Christianity is true. His point is that the Western understanding of "good" is derived from Christianity. See this interview for more: Mantravadi, Amy, "An Interview with Tom Holland about Cultural Christianity," February 19, 2025, *1517: Christ For You*, <https://www.1517.org/articles/an-interview-with-tom-holland-about-cultural-christianity>, [accessed May 16, 2025].

⁸ Stonestreet, John and Shane Morris, "Richard Dawkins, a 'Cultural Christian,'" April 9, 2024, *Colson Center: Breakpoint*, <https://www.breakpoint.org/richard-dawkins-a-cultural-christian/>, [accessed May 16, 2025].

Seeing a man walk after being lame for forty years will leave an impression on people. Luke says, “They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”

So, what’s the takeaway? The greatest testimony for Christ is a changed life.

Jesus once healed a blind man. But the Lord withdrew himself before the man could discover who healed him. As was the case here in Acts 3 with a man lame from birth, this man had been blind since birth. And so, such a healing, as in Acts 3, created quite the commotion. So much so that the religious leaders began interrogating the man, wanting to know if, as they suspected, it was Jesus who had healed him. But all that the formerly blind man could say was, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see” (Jn. 9:15). This man knew nothing about Jesus. All he knew was what he experienced. However, such a straightforward and unapologetic testimony didn’t sit right with the religious leaders. So, to control the narrative, the Pharisee tell him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner” (Jn. 9:24). In response, the no-longer-blind-man said, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (Jn 9:25). The Jews don’t like this response, and the conversation quickly begins to devolve. The Pharisees didn’t want Jesus to get any good publicity.

Eventually, things come to a head. The once blind man says, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (Jn. 9:30-33). The religious leaders didn't like this response, and so they cast him out, excommunicating him from Jewish society.

It may be good or bad, but a Christian's testimony is bound to leave an impression on people. How's your testimony? Are you ashamed of Christ? Or are you bold for Christ? That lame man couldn't help but praise God in front of everyone. I wish we exhibited such boldness in our town square.

Video Description:

Filled | Week 8 | “A Celebrity Conversion” (Acts 3:1-10)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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Setting those concerns aside, it is wonderful to see someone who was once the poster child for darkness become a beacon for light. And, interestingly, celebrity conversions are not new. John Chrysostom, a fourth-century church father, talks about how a woman named Pelagia, known throughout the Mediterranean world as an actress and prostitute, became a Christian.

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In today’s passage, someone like a celebrity comes to Christ. And though he is known more for his disability than his abilities, God uses his reputation for gospel glory. Indeed, whether we’re renowned or unknown, should we point people to Christ, God can use our name to accomplish great things for his name.

Sermon Manuscript:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

⁹ Chrysostom, John, *Thee Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Vol. 2, (Jazzybee Verlag: 1844), p. 231.

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