**An Example of Apostolic Teamwork**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A policeman pulled a car over one day and said to the motorist, “Sir, I clocked you at 90 mph, so I’m going to have to give you a ticket.” The man replied, “That can’t be, Officer, I had my cruise control set at 60.” Just then his wife spoke up and said, “Now dear, you know we don’t have cruise control!” He responded by angrily declaring, “Can’t you keep your big mouth shut just once?” She gave him a look, but said nothing.

Then the officer said, “I also have to issue you *another* citation for not wearing your seat belt.” He responded, “I had it on, but took it off to reach for my wallet to show you my license.” But his wife chimed in to say, “Now dear, you know you never wear your seat belt.” This caused him to say in an even *louder* voice, “Woman, would you please just *shut up!”* At this point, the officer asked her, “Does he always talk to you that way.” She smiled sweetly and said, “Heavens no, just when he’s been drinking!”

Well, what we have there is a poor example of marital teamwork. But what we have in our text in Acts 3 is a good example of *apostolic* teamwork!

**“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour**

**“And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;**

**“Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.**

**“And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.**

**“And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.**

**“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:1-6).**

Now as we begin to consider this passage, did you ever read Verse 1 and wonder why Peter and John are the only apostles that are mentioned here? As you know, the Lord had 12 apostles on His team. And as you may also know, He had three favorite apostles, as we see when the ruler of a synagogue asked Him to come to his house to heal his daughter, and the Lord answered,

**“Be not afraid, only believe. And He suffered no man to follow Him, *save Peter, and James, and John…*And He cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue” (Mark 5:36-38).**

This suggests that Peter, James and John were part of what we could call the Lord’s inner circle of apostles. Of course, I suppose it is possible that the Lord didn’t bring all twelve apostles to this ruler’s house for they wouldn’t all fit in his daughter’s room. Houses in those days were so small that the Lord had to send some apostles to find a room large enough in which He and the twelve could eat the Passover. But I would think that the ruler of the synagogue would live in a fairly large home.

Either way, this wasn’t the only time the Lord singled out those three apostles for special attention, as we see in Mark 9:2, where we read,

**“…after six days Jesus taketh with him *Peter, and James, and John,* and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them.”**

Now there was plenty of room on the top of that mountain for all twelve apostles to go and witness the Lord’s transfiguration. Yet again He deliberately brought only the three.

The Lord also separated Peter, James and John from the rest of the apostles in the garden of Gethsemane, where He went to pray before going to the cross:

**“And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and He saith to His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And He taketh with Him *Peter and James and John*, and …saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed…” (Mark 14:32-35).**

As you can see, the Lord wanted Peter, James and John nearer to Him than the rest of the apostles when He poured out His heart to God in prayer in His last hours.

But at some point, *James* seems to have slipped from his place among the Lord’s favored few. We see the first evidence of this in Luke 22:8, where we read of the Lord that

**“He sent *Peter and John,* saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat”**

Ever after this, the Bible seems to focus on Peter and John, with any mention of James being conspicuous by its absence:

**“…when they saw the boldness of *Peter and John…*they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*…Peter and John answered*…” (Acts 4:13,18,19).**

What’s more, the Jewish kingdom church seemed to recognize that the Lord had singled out Peter and John, as we see “when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God” (Acts 8:14), and “they sent unto them *Peter and John.”*

Now don’t get me wrong, James was still an apostle. He just didn’t have the same presence in that inner circle of apostles that he had earlier in his ministry. And I can’t tell you why that might be, at least not with any degree of certainty. But it’s possible that it was due to what happened in Mark 10:35-37:

**“*James and John,* the sons of Zebedee…come unto him, saying, Master…Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.”**

Maybe *that’s* why James fell out of the Lord’s favor to some degree. The pride he showed in wanting the best seats in the house in the kingdom of heaven on earth might have led to his seeming demotion.

You say, “But John was also in on that power grab!” And that’s true. But you’ll notice that James and John were both sons of Zebedee. That meant they were brothers. But every time they’re mentioned, James is mentioned first. That might be because he was the elder, but it might also be so because he was the dominant personality between the two. I mean, half of the time we read about Aquilla and Priscilla, she is mentioned first, even though you would think *he* would be mentioned first, as the husband. That suggests that she was the more outgoing of the two.

So when James is always mentioned before his brother John, it’s possible that he was the dominant personality, and subsequently the ringleader in that plot to get the best seats in the house in the kingdom, with John just kind of going along with it.

If that was the case, then he is a good example of something we read about in Proverbs 16:18, where Solomon wrote,

**“Pride goeth before *destruction,* and an haughty spirit *before a fall.”***

It’s possible that James’ pride caused him to fall from his spot in the Lord’s favorite threesome. After all, Solomon also wrote,

**“*A man's pride shall bring him low:* but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).**

Now is there anything you can learn from all that? I don’t know if there’s anything that will make more of a mess of your life than simple human *pride.* I know it has made some of the biggest messes in my own life. Throughout the Bible, *humility* is emphasized, humbleness of mind. So pride should be something that you avoid like the spiritual plague that it is.

But now, if you think about it, Peter *also* fell victim to pride. When the Lord told the twelve that they would all forsake Him when the soldiers came to arrest Him (Mark 14:27), how’d Peter respond to the Lord’s prediction?

**“Peter said unto Him, Although all shall be offended, *yet will not I.* And Jesus saith unto him…before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice. *But he spake the more vehemently,* If I should die with thee, *I will not deny thee in any wise”* (Mark 14:28-31).**

Does that sound like pride to you? It does to me! So if James lost his place among the Lord’s three favorite apostles due to his pride, how come Peter didn’t lose *his* place?

This is why I think it is more likely that James counted *himself* out of the Lord’s inner circle. It reminds me of a pastor friend of mine who remarried after his wife died. Thinking that all Christian women would be as spiritual as his first wife, he married a little too quickly, though, and his new wife divorced him soon after. For years afterward, this dear brother wouldn’t speak at any of our Bible conferences. He felt he wasn’t qualified to teach God’s Word. It took him many yearsto realize that he was the only one who felt he was disqualified from the ministry. And I think the same was true of James.

If you are thinking, “But it seems *the Lord* was holding it against James, for He sent only Peter and John to seek the room for the Passover.” Well, I think the Lord honored James’ decision to step back from the inner circle in order to give him time to heal, just as He wanted the dear pastor of whom I spoke to have time to heal. This pastor eventually came back stronger than ever, and James will too, in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

But I think there’s something we can learn from all of that as well. And that is not to be so hard on ourselves when we find we’ve made a mistake, or feel like we’ve let the Lord down in some way. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard from Christians who made some kind of spiritual gaffe, and never let themselves off the hook. They continue to beat themselves up about their blunder, and think that they are not qualified to serve the Lord. I always remind such people that if the Lord has forgiven them, they should forgive themselves. And if they *don’t* forgive themselves, then that means their standards are higher than God’s. And if your standards are higher than God’s, that’s a problem! God is “satisfied” (Isa. 53:11) with the payment Christ made for any and all of our sins, and we should be too.

Now when it says that Peter and John went up “into the temple,” that’s not something you’d think they would do, for a couple of reasons. First of all, you wouldn’t think they’d go there after what the Lord said when the Jews rejected Him, and He stormed out of the temple, saying,

**“Behold, *your house is left unto you desolate”* (Matthew 23:38).**

Compare His words here to the ones He chose to describe the temple soon after His ministry began, when He referred to it as “My Father’s house” (John 2:16). The temple was *God’s* house, but after the Jews rejected the Lord, He seemed to disown it, calling it *their* house.

But then on the cross, He prayed, “Father, *forgive them”* (Luke 23:34), and He gave the Jews another chance in the Book of Acts, just as He predicted He would in the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). And when He did, He once again recognized the temple as His center of operations. That’s why we read in Acts 2:46,

**“And they, continuing daily with one accord *in the temple*, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46).**

And the temple *continued* to be the apostles’ center of operations *throughout* the Book of Acts. So much so that the word “temple” is used 28 times in Acts, more than in any other book of the Bible.

And that’s significant, in light of what most pastors and Bible teachers say about Acts. They say that “the church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22,23) began in Acts 2 after God broke off relations with Israel at the cross. They hold that God *didn’t* give the Jews a second chance, that He started something new at Pentecost.

But if He did, you’d think He would have told the twelve to stop hanging out in the Jews’ temple. You know, like Paul didafter the Body of Christ *really* began with his conversion in Acts 9.

And you’d *also* think that God would have told them to stop observing the “hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1) the Jews had to observe under the law. But as you can see, James and John were still observing it, something that showed that they were still under the law, and not under grace (cf. Rom. 6:15).

The Jews actually had *three* hours of prayer, as we see when David prayed,

**“*Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray,* and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).**

If it seems strange that David would talk about praying “evening, morning, and at noon,” as opposed to “morning, noon, and evening” as we would say, it helps to remember that after the first day of creation, we read that “the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5). As you may know, this was God’s way of teaching the Jews to start their day at 6 p.m. in the evening. That means their first hour of prayer came in the evening at 6, their *next* hour of prayer came the next day at 9 a.m., the “third hour of the day” that Peter references in Acts 2:15, and their *last* hour of prayer came at noon, the sixth hour of the day. You may remember that Daniel prayed three times a day, even after the king threatened to turn him into cat food if he did.

And you know what? Peter never *did* quit observing the law’s hours of prayer, as we see in Acts 10:9, when “Peter went up upon the housetop to pray *about the sixth hour.”* This shows that even after the dispensation of grace began with Paul’s salvation in Acts 9, Peter never became a part of God’s new program of grace. Instead, he kept practicing the precepts of the law of Moses. It was *Paul* whom God chose to make the break with the Jews religion, and start something new with the dispensation of grace!

And we see more evidence that nothing new started at Pentecost when we consider that these three hours of prayer coincided with the three times a day God’s people in Israel were required to bring animal sacrifices (Lev. 9:17; I Kings 18:29). We know that the twelve apostles continued to offer sacrifices, as well as offering up their prayers thrice daily, for years after the age of grace began with Paul, James told him,

**“Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law…four men…entered into the temple…*until that an offering should be offered for every one of them”* (Acts 21:20,23,26).**

Here we see *more* proof that nothing new started with the twelve apostles. So don’t be looking to what they did in the Book of Acts for the specifics of how to live your spiritual life in the dispensation of grace. And don’t look to what they say to do in their epistles either, for their epistles don’t reflect what God is doing today in the dispensation of grace either.

Now we see even *more* evidence that nothing new started at Pentecost in what happens as we read on in our text in Acts 3:

**“And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple” (Acts 3:2).**

As you know, Peter and John went on to *heal* this lame man (v. 6-8). And healing lame men was one of the miraculous signs the Lord performed to prove that He was Israel’s messiah. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask the Lord if He was really the Christ, He replied by telling them,

**“tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, *the lame walk...”* (Luke 7:22).**

But the Lord wasn’t the only one who was supposed to give the people of Israel signs that He was their messiah. Speaking of the future, the prophet Isaiah quoted the Lord in advance as saying,

**“Behold, I *and the children whom the Lord hath given Me* are for signs and for wonders in Israel…” (Isaiah 8:18).**

As you can see, the Lord’s children were *also* supposed to give signs and wonders proving He was the Christ. Of course, He had no children! Not in the physical sense, anyway. But in John 13:33, He called His apostles “little children,” and He again referred to them as children in John 21:5. *That’s* why the twelve worked miracles like the healing of this lame man at Pentecost! It was to prove that what they were preaching was true, that Jesus *was* Israel’s Christ (Acts 2:36).

You say, “But Paul also worked miracles! He even healed a lame man in Acts 14!” And that’s true. But let’s compare Paul’s *first* miracle with Peter and John’s first miracle here in Acts 3.

In Paul’s first miracle, a Jew was blinded due to his unbelief, so that salvation could go to a Gentile. If that sounds familiar, *it should,* for that’s what is happening today in the dispensation of grace! Paul wrote,

**“*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery,* lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; *that blindness in part is happened to Israel,* until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25).**

So *Paul’s* first miracle was symbolic of what is happening today in the age of grace. The Jews are blinded due to their unbelief, while salvation goes to the Gentiles.

But as we are about to see, *Peter’s* first miracle is *also* symbolic. It was symbolic of what was happening in Israel at Pentecost. And what was happening at Pentecost has nothing to do with what is happening today in the dispensation of grace.

To begin with, this man was *lame.* Now our word “lame” can mean someone who walks with a limp. But in the Bible, the word refers to someone who can’t walk at all (Mt. 15:31). That’s why the Lord told John’s disciples that one of the signs He was the Christ was that He was able to make the lame walk. We know that this particular lame man couldn’t walk at all for we read that he was “laid” at the gate of the temple every day. That means he couldn’t walk there by himself!

But that was symbolic of the nation of Israel! Spiritually speaking, they were lame! That meant they couldn’t walk with God. And *that* meant they couldn’t be saved, for Solomon wrote,

**“Whoso walketh uprightly *shall be saved…”* (Proverbs 28:18).**

If you wanted to be saved under the law, God said you had to do what He wrote in Exodus 16:4:

**“Walk in My law” (Exodus 16:4).**

And the nation of Israel *wasn’t* walking in God’s law. And do you know *why* they weren’t? Well, this lame man who symbolized the nation was lame *from his mother’s womb.* And his mother’s womb was symbolic of the Jews religion, as we see when Paul gave his testimony and said,

**“…ye have heard of my conversation in time past *in the Jews' religion,* how that…I…profited *in the Jews' religion*…But when it pleased God, *who separated me from my mother's womb,* and called me by his grace” (Galatians 1:13-15).**

Do you see how his mother’s womb was a metaphor that stood for the Jews’ religion? He says, in effect, “I had my conversation in the Jews’ religion, I profited in the Jews’ religion, but God separated me from the Jews’ religion.” So when we read that this lame man was lame from his mother’s womb, it is symbolic of how the nation of Israel was *spiritually* lame because of the Jews religion. That is, he was lame due to the *mess* that the Jews had *made* of their religion.

You see, the religion that God gave the Jews in the law of Moses helped men walk in God’s ways and be saved. But they had made it into something that made men spiritually lame instead, *incapable* of walking with God and being saved!

Now the temple where this lame man was laid each day was where God lived, of course. That made it a symbol of the kingdom of heaven on earth, for that’s where God will live during the millennium. So when this lame man was laying *at the doorstep* of the temple, that was symbolic of where the nation Israel stood at that time—at the doorstep of the kingdom, but too lame to *enter* the kingdom! So as you can see, Peter’s first miracle is as symbolic as Paul’s first miracle.

You know, the apostles did “many” miracles at Pentecost (Acts 2:43). But as the Spirit recorded their words and deeds in the Book of Acts, He couldn’t record *all* the miracles they did. But the ones He *did* record were not chosen at random. The miracles He recorded reflected what God was doing at the time. Peter’s first miracle reflected what God was doing in Israel at that time, and Paul’s first miracle reflected what God is doing in us today.

Now speaking of the lame man, our text goes on to say,

**“Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms” (Acts 3:3).**

Now that word “alms” refers to money that was given to the poor. Since this man couldn’t work, he was forced to beg. And that’s what the Jews’ religion had done to the nation of Israel! Instead of *enriching* them in the kingdom, it had reduced them to the status of *spiritual beggars.*

But fortunately for the lame man here, he was asking for help from the right men, as we see in Acts 3:4-6:

**“And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.**

**“And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.**

**“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”**

Now you’ll notice that Peter didn’t say, “I have *some* money, I just can’t spare any.” He said he didn’t have *any money at all.* And if you know your Bible, you know why. If you wanted to be saved under the kingdom program that the Lord instituted among the Jews when He was here on earth (cf. Rom. 15:8), you had to do what He told the rich young ruler to do when he asked the Lord,

**“Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him…*sell all that thou hast*, and distribute unto the poor…” (Luke 18:18,22).**

To be saved in those days, you had to sell all that you had and share the proceeds with the saints. We know Peter had complied with this requirement for right after the Lord spoke these words to the rich young ruler,

**“Peter…said…we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; *what shall we have therefore?* And Jesus said unto them…*everlasting life”* (Matthew 19:27-29).**

So the reason Peter had *no* silver or gold was that he had done what they *all* did at Pentecost: sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with the saints.

Now having said that, there was a sense in which Peter actually had *plenty* of money, for we read that,

**“…as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, *And* *laid them down at the apostles' feet”* (Acts 4:34,35).**

Well, Peter was one of those apostles! But the money they gave him wasn’t for beggars, it was for the maintenance of the saints. And they didn’t *dare* use it for anything else.

This reminds me of how we get frequent requests for money here at *Berean Bible Society,* sometimes from people with very legitimate needs. But I always tell them that the only money we have was given to us by people who expect us to use it to promote Paul’s gospel, and we dare not betray their trust by using their money for anything else.

Now if you want to give money to beggars as an individual believer, that’s between you and the Lord. I personally don’t give money to strangers, for I don’t know if they are sincerely needy, so I don’t know if any money I might give will be misused. I sometimes make an exception by tucking some money in a gospel tract to share with indigent people, and I would encourage you to do the same should you choose to help a stranger. But outside of that, give your money to the members of your church family. That way you’ll know the money you share is not misused.

But now, did you notice that Peter didn’t ask the man if he wanted to be healed? He didn’t even ask him if he *believed* that Peter could heal him. He just told the man to get up and walk, invoking the power of the name of Christ. I point that out to compare it to what happens today when men go to see a healer, and fail to get healed. What’s the excuse that is generally given as to why the healer wasn’t able to heal you? You didn’t have enough faith, right? You didn’t really *believe* the healer could heal you.

Well, compare that to the lame man here. How much faith did he have to be healed? He didn’t even know he was going to be healed. He never saw it coming! Listen, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ can heal you whether you have enough faith or not. The question isn’t whether or not you have enough faith. The question is whether men have the gift of healing today. They don’t. That’s just one of the *many* ways you know that healers today aren’t sent by God.

*Another* way you can know that is by what we read in our text as we go on. Speaking of Peter and the lame man, we read,

**“And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.**

**“And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:7,8).**

You see, when *God* heals people, He heals them *completely,* and *utterly,* and *magnificently!* Compare that to the anemic healings you see on Christian television!

And still *another* way you know that modern healers aren’t sent by God is when we compare their work to what we see as we read on in our text:

**“And all the people saw him walking and praising God:**

**“And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:9,10).**

This was a man that everyone in the community knew *personally.* They’d seen him begging at the Beautiful gate *for years.* Compare that to the healings you see on Christian television. You don’t know if those folks are really sick! You don’t know if those who say they are lame truly can’t walk! But *this* healing was one that even the Lord’s *enemies* couldn’t deny as we’ll see in later studies.

We close in Acts 3:11, where we read,

**“And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.”**

Here we see more evidence that what was happening at Pentecost was a taste of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In describing the kingdom, Isaiah wrote,

**“the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose…*Then shall the lame man leap as an hart*, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out…” (Isaiah 35:1,6).**

What a day that will be for the people of Israel! People who were lame all of their lives will be walking and leaping and praising God! You know, just like *we’ll* be doing in the kingdom of heaven in heaven! Your God knows how to fix everything that is wrong with your body. He’s just giving you the opportunity to show the world that His grace is sufficient for you.

Let me ask you, what gives God more glory, healing a man or teaching him to be content *without* being healed? If you know anything about the *impatience* of human natue, you know that God is getting *far* more glory today than He did at Pentecost. That is, *if* you are able to endure your afflictions with *patience.* If you’re not, why not make it a matter of prayer? You’ll be eternally glad you did.