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space

4 THINGS EVERY CHURCH NEEDS TO GROW

by Eddie Lawrence

INTRODUCTION:

***Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, 'It might have been.'***

These words were penned by J. G. Whittier and ring with truth. The people who carried out great exploits in Scripture rose to the occasion when opportunity presented itself. They moved in faith and power and today we still love to hear their testimonies. Today we will read of such an occasion when two men of God responded to an opportunity that paved the way for God's glory to be poured out on an entire city.

TEXT: Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 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 from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

TRANSITION: With this text in mind, I would like to share with you four things we can identify that enabled Peter and John to be used of God in a way that met someone's need and led to the growth of the early church in a powerful way. Of course, there are many things that could be added to such a list but let's pull out four of them. The first is a

1. PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

THE NEED-Verse 2 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 from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

THE SUPPLY-Verse 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

THE KEY - Peter and John knew God was able to give this man what he really needed beyond what the money could have bought him. Instead of coins to provide a meal, he gave him the health to begin to make a living and a Savior to give him an eternity of provision.

APPLICATIONS:

"God called us to be distributors not manufacturers."

"Don't focus on what you don't have when ministering to people. Focus on what you do have. God uses what you have to bring about miracles.

-The little boy had two fishes but they became enough to feed thousands.

-Peter had no tax money but he had a fishing net which caught a fish that had the money.

-Peter and John had no silver or gold, but they had access to the One who had it all. We have the same thing do we not?

ILLUSTRATION-One Sunday afternoon my wife and I were taking a short walk when we were overtaken by a storm. We took shelter in a neighboring church where we found a special service for Sunday school scholars in progress. The vicar was catechizing the children, and asked: "What is a miracle?" A little girl put up her hand and replied, "Something we can't do, but Jesus can." The minister seemed surprised at this original answer, and pressed for a response in "more dignified English." Several chimed out the set answer he wanted, "A parable in action," and he seemed well satisfied. It left me cold, however, for I was still thinking of the little child's definition, "Something we can't do, but Jesus can."—Christian Herald.

Peter and John understood this and we must too. Jesus can do what we can't! If we are willing, God is able!

2. SPIRIT LED SENSITIVITY AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS NEEDS

THE ABILITY TO SEE- Verse 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

We need to learn to be sensitive and see with our spiritual eyes what cannot be seen with our natural eyes. How often do we just push people aside or thoughts aside when in fact God is trying to get our attention so we will give someone else our attention? When we do this, then we can get their attention and help focus it where it needs to be focused. That is what happened in the text before us.

THE ABILITY TO PERCEIVE- It is obvious, that Peter discerned that God wanted to do something supernatural. When he took him by the hand, Peter knew that God's hand was also reaching down and touching the man. This sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is key in our daily lives.

"As many as are led by the Spirit, they are the sons of God." Romans 8:14

Peter and John were being led by the Holy Spirit

3. PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN MEETING NEEDS

THE FAITH TO ACT -Verse 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

-When God desires to work through you to help others, faith will be required. Will you be willing to trust Him to do what you know you cannot do in and of yourself?

-It is when we do what we can do, that the step is taken to see God do what we cannot do.

HOW BIG A SITUATION CAN GOD HANDLE?

ILLUSTRATION-A church of which I was at one time pastor was heavily in debt, and I made it a matter of prayer. One day a stranger called on me and said, "Mr. McNeill, I understand that you have a debt on your church that you are anxious to pay. I have heard a great deal about your work and I want to help." Then laying a blank check on my desk, he said, "Fill in the amount you require and I will return later and sign it." Then he was gone.

As I sat looking at that check I said, "Surely he doesn't realize that our debt runs into thousands of pounds. He would never give that much. He told me to make it out for the full amount, but I'll just put down half. I'm afraid he will not even sign that much."

After a little while the stranger returned, and with scarcely a glance signed the check, and left without another word. I looked at the signature; it was that of a well-known philanthropist. When I realized that he meant what he said, and could easily have paid the whole debt, I exclaimed, "Oh, man of little faith, I will never doubt again." (The King's Business)

4. AN AIM TO GLORIFY GOD

Verses 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

-The above verses and the stories that follow demonstrate that the man who was healed glorified God. Many of the people around him glorified God and the story spread and resulted in thousands getting saved and glorifying God. This all started with Peter and John choosing to live their lives in a way that God could use them to bring glory to Himself.

-This is the way Jesus told us it would happen. A very familiar verse of Scripture bears this out:

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

-By Peter and John's sensitivity to reach one person, the door was opened to reach the masses.

-When we don't live to glorify God, we live for the wrong ends.

Consider these----

Unhealthy Alternatives to Glorifying God through What We Do:

A. Being Blind to Others and Just Live for Ourselves

B. Take Advantage of People's Needs for Ourselves - This is using people to get what we want instead of helping people to get what they need.

C. To See The Needs of Others and Choose to Be Unresponsive

CONCLUSION: As you think of these four things, how do you measure up? Are you challenged to become more sensitive, to use your faith to see God work and to be more involved in helping others? Are you willing to believe that what might seem a small thing can become the spark of a massive revival in the hands of God?

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