

Session #4: Acts Chapter 3:1-4:22

Compiled and written by Theresa Lisiecki

Peter Cures a Crippled Beggar 3:1-10

We read in Acts 2:43: *and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.* St. Luke now gives testimony to one of those moments worked through the apostle Peter. St. Peter will later in this chapter preach as to the significance of this sign. Through both moments we can clearly see that the Apostles are continuing the work of Jesus. (View Youtube video: *Peter and John heal a man crippled from birth* by Oranu34 (3:22 minutes)



3:1 Peter and John going up to the temple at the time of prayer *It is very interesting that the apostles kept up the customs in which they had been trained. It was the hour of prayer, and Peter and John were going into the Temple to observe it. A new faith had come to them, but they did not use that as an excuse to break the old law. They were aware that the new faith and the old discipline could walk hand in hand.*

The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles

the three o'clock hour of prayer If we look to the literal translation of this verse we would read: *at the ninth hour of prayer.* For the people of that period the day began at 6am and ended at 6pm. Every hour after is added a number, therefore 7am is first... 8am is the second... 9am is the third and so on. The ninth hour of prayer is 3pm. Two times a day the Temple priest offered sacrifices around which the masses would offer public prayer. Morning sacrifices/prayers which began at 9am and evening sacrifices/prayers which began at 3pm. Interesting that Jesus dies as sacrifice for our sins at 3pm just as the Temple Priests are offering animal sacrifices. A happy accident? I think not. To this day we see this hour, 3pm as a significant hour of prayer. Many have committed themselves to stop what they are doing and pray to the Divine Mercy.

3:2 was carried and placed at the gate...every day We can imagine that the family or friends or neighbors of this man, on their way to work, brought him each day to this place in the Temple so as to beg for enough money to feed himself and possibly his family. Charity towards the poor was considered a blessing for the Jews if one was generous of heart.

Beautiful gate Most likely this was the entrance that led from the court of the Gentile into the Temple proper. Gentiles would not have been allowed past this gate yet every Jew, male or female, would have passed through this gate so a very busy place. . Some scholars suggest that this man was placed outside the Temple proper not only because of the foot traffic but because this was as close as he could come to the Holy of Holies because of his infirmities. His malady would have been understood by the priests and people as an outer state of inward sin. In his impurity he would not have been allowed to enter the Temple. Maybe it wasn't just a practical matter of this lame man's position outside the gate but a desire to be as close to God as he could possibly get. SEE MAP.

3:4 Look at us You get the sense from St. Peter's command to "Look at us" that the beggar was someplace else in his mind as he pleaded from the passersby for money. Peter wanted

his full attention so that this man would understand what was about to happen to him. All miracles require cooperation, openness to the gift. The merest of acts such as turning one's attention towards God, and in this case St. Peter, can inspire the Holy Spirit to a miracle. This statement of St. Peter – *Look at us* should also remind us that as believers we too should not be hidden off somewhere but expecting the world, asking the world around us to look at us and see us live our lives in faith. Look at our marriages. Look at our homes. Look at the way we do our work... care for our neighbors... spend our money... interact with the world.

3:6 *"I have neither silver nor gold* St. Peter is creating a contrast between what is valued and given by humanity to what is valued and given by God. In the original language the Greek word used is *eleemosyne* which can be interpreted in two ways. *Eleemosyne* can mean either alms given to the poor or the mercy of God. Those first readers of this document would have been aware of the play on words. The beggar was asking for *eleemosyne*/alms but was given *eleemosyne*/the mercy of God in the form of healing freeing him from his lameness.

In the name of Jesus We often hear this phrase in the context of Church life. We are asked to pray in the name of Jesus or walk in the name of Jesus or we do something in the name of Jesus. What does that mean? The Greek word for "name", *onoma*, appears about sixty times in the book of Acts. To name in the bible and carries over into church life is understood as an act of God. Our name, from a spiritual perspective, denotes the nature, authority and power of a person. For Hebrews God's name was synonymous with His presence and His power. (2 Samuel 7:13) What is the second commandment? *You shall not take the name of God in vain.* (Exodus 20:7) This is why in the Hebrew bible you will not find the name of God. What you will find is YHWH which we in the Christian world (through the first German translators) later added vowels to become Yahweh. YHWH was used over 5500 times when the words of the Old Testament were first written down because the belief was that the name of God was so holy normal mortals should not pronounce it. Instead, wherever the scriptures were recited orally, when the reader came to YHWH, they would pronounce the Hebrew word for lord which is *Adonai*. To this day the Catholic Church holds that to speak or to act "in the name of Jesus" is to invoke his healing presence and power. The Church prays at every Mass in the name of Jesus. It is not just an ending to a prayer so we know to move on such as ending a story "the end". To pray in the name of Jesus is fundamentally an expression of faith in that the goodness, compassion, mercy and will of God will happen. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#203) states: *to disclose one's name is to make oneself know to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.* To name God, to use the name of Jesus is to tap into the power of God because God/Jesus become accessible/present. Throughout salvation history God revealed Himself, aspects of Himself through "construct names". What is a construct name? We find in scripture the name of God followed by an aspect of who God is. Examples:

- *Yahweh-jireh*: God will provide – Genesis 22:14
- *Yahweh-rapha*: God my healer – Exodus 15:26
- *Yahweh-nissi*: God my banner – Exodus 17:15 (meaning that he will fight for us)

Session #4: Acts Chapter 3:1-4:22

- *Yahweh-shalom*: God my peace – Judges 6:24
- *Yahweh-ra-ah*: God my Shepherd – Psalm 23
- *Yahweh-tsidkenu*: God my righteousness – Jeremiah 23:6
- *Yahweh-shamma*: God is present – Ezekiel 48:35
- Other names we find in scripture and in prayer that we use for the name of God; *Elohim* (sited over 2550 times in the Bible), *El Shaddai* (the Almighty One), *El Elyon* (The Most High God), *El Hai* (The Living God), *El Gibor* (the Almighty), *Sabaoth* (the Lord of Hosts).

Through each of these names we know an aspect of God. In the New Testament we read the name that Mary is to give to the Son of God – Jesus or in Hebrew *Yeshua* which means – God saves!

For further reflection on asking for something “in the name of Jesus” READ: Mark 16:17; John 14:13-14, 16:23-24; Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18

3:8 walking and leaping and praising God

We can understand this moment as simply the outward expression of the inward joy of this now healed man. But scholars suggest we should see this as more. The movement of the man, once lame is a sign that the Messianic age has come. We are now all free to walk in the presence of God leaping for joy and singing God’s praises. It is also interesting to note that St. Luke uses the word “leaping” twice in this verse – leaping up and leaping for joy. There is only one other place that the word leaping is used in the bible – Isaiah 35:6: *Then will the lame leap like a stag.* Isaiah 35:5-6 is a prophetic statement regarding the renewal of Israel. We can here assume that St. Luke is using this word to remind Jewish readers and to make the statement that this prophecy is now fulfilled in the Messianic age. Miracles continue to happen to this day for those who have enough faith to see and believe.

Peter Proclaims the Truth 3:11-26

Peter now offers a second speech or discourse which contains two parts. First (3:11-16) he explains the miracle and in the second (3:17-26) he challenges his listeners to repentance.

3:11-16

3:11 portico called Solomon’s

the word “portico” can also be translated as “porch”. Surrounding the outer perimeter of the court of Gentiles were covered walkways. It was common practice that the Rabbis would sit in the shade of the covering and teach their students. Jesus taught in this colonnade (John 5:12).

Scholars believe Solomon’s Portico was a favorite gathering place for the early Christians.

3:13 The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob

This was the formula used by God spoken to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:6). St. Peter is identifying that the power of healing the lame comes not from him but from God. Scholars suggest because Peter is using this



particular formula that harkens back to Moses that he wants his listeners to make the connection to Moses. Moses brought about physical liberation from slavery. Jesus brings about total liberation of mind, heart, soul and body.

has glorified his servant Jesus There is a lot going on in this small passage. We can understand that Jesus' resurrection and ascension was the act of God glorifying His Son. Humanity, through the desperate desires of the Temple leadership and acts of the Romans to condemn and curse Jesus, God reverses their judgement and exalts His Son. The word servant in its original Greek can also be translated "son" or "child" but scholars are of the opinion St. Peter meant servant to remind his readers that Jesus was the suffering servant proclaimed by Isaiah (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 53) of God's will. Peter is challenging them to understand just because Jesus didn't look like what they expected, Jesus was in truth the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets.

3:14 The Holy and Righteous One In Old Testament terms these are given as titles for God but of course St. Peter is referring to here Jesus. He does so by emphasizing His unique relationship to the Father and in doing so recognizes that Jesus was sinless and was in right relationship with God. As opposed to the one the crowd called for – Barabbas who was guilty of a civil crime and filled with sin against God.

3:15 the author of life This idea can hold too meanings. Mostly, in terms of this address that through Jesus Salvation or eternal life is accessible to all, but scholars also look to this statement as Jesus, the Son of God, one in the Triune God was there at the beginning of all life.

3:17-26

3:17 acted out of ignorance St. Peter is giving them a break and thus allowing the listening crowd some hopes of redemption. He is acknowledging that it was because of the ignorance they did not recognize Jesus for who he was and because of that acted in a wrong way towards him. Even Jesus himself acknowledges this ignorance from the cross when he says: *Father forgive them, they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

3:18 the mouth of all the prophets While the prophets were speaking for God in a specific situation at a specific moment there was always a deeper meaning. From the eyes of Christian understanding, from the perspective of Christ we can now see that deeper meaning that much of what they said also had the significance of messianic prophecy – of proclaiming the acts and experience of the coming Messiah.

3:19 your sins be blotted out Through the waters of baptism all sins of the person are cleansed away but what is required or at least hoped for in an adult is conversion of heart. Pope Paul VI explained the idea of conversion as a change of heart. *We are called to this change and it will make us see many things. The first has to do with interior analysis of our soul... we should examine ourselves as to what is the main direction our life is taking, what attitude is usually to the fore in the way we think and act, what is our reason of being... Is our rudder fixed so as to bring us exactly to our goal or does its direction need perhaps to be changed? ... By examining ourselves in this way ... we will*

Session #4: Acts Chapter 3:1-4:22

discover sins, or at least weaknesses, which call for penance and profound reform. Quote taken from Pope Paul's General Audience of March 21, 1973.

3:20 *send you the Messiah* This is one of the few moments, and the only one in Acts where reference to the second coming of Christ is made.

3:21 *universal restoration* Like the term "refreshment" in verse 20, this refers to the world made perfect at the second coming of Christ.

3:22-23 *A prophet like me* This is a paraphrase of the words of Moses taken from Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses was reminding the people that they, out of fear, had requested not to hear the voice of God direct so God would send them prophets. Moses was challenging them to listen closely to these prophets so they would know how to live in right relationship with God. At the time of Jesus the Jews were looking for a prophet to come into their age and from the early Christian tradition this text from Deuteronomy was applied to Jesus.

3:25 *in your prosperity* Some protestant groups use this verse to support the idea of what is called "prosperity ministry" meaning those who walk closely with God in right relationship will know great riches and prosperity in their lifetime. Catholic scholars interpret this verse as understanding or reminding all of the divine oath sworn to Abraham (Genesis 22:18) to make his descendants number as the stars in heaven and the sands on a beach. St. Peter is making the point that through Jesus life and relationship has been restored between the Jews, and all peoples, and God.

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin 4:1-22

What we have in this first section of chapter four is the results of Peter's teaching – conflict between the Apostles and disciples of Jesus and the Temple leadership. The healing of the man and Peter's teaching has brought to the portico a large crowd which alerts the Temple guard whose job it is to keep order. In these first verses of chapter four we study the 1st conflict between the authority and the early church.

4:1-4

4:1 *the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees* Each of these people/groups makes up the leadership of the Temple. The priests are those men who perform the sacrifice and rituals which make up the Temple liturgies and prayers. The Temple guards were also from the tribe of Levi which is the priestly tribe and were responsible for policing the Temple area and doing the bidding of the High Priest, much like the Swiss Guard does at the Vatican and for the Pope. The captain of the guard, the man in charge of the guards, was ranked next in power after the high priest. The priestly sect was basically divided into two philosophical or theological camps – the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were drawn from what we today would say the "Blue Collar" families and the Sadducees from the aristocratic families, the rich and powerful. The Sadducees theology



rejected the idea of the resurrection of the body after death. It should be noted that this was the same group of men (along with many Pharisees) who had Jesus arrested and sat in judgement of Him. Jesus' words in John 15:20 *A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you* have come to fulfillment.

4:2 *proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead* This is what upset the temple leadership so much – the resurrection of the dead, or at least what they were arrested for. The leadership struggled because this problem of Jesus was not solved with his death as they had hoped. Now His apostles and disciples are continuing to teach and preach doctrines that challenge their authority and teachings.

4:3 *for it was already evening* The gates of the Temple were closed and locked after the evening sacrifice and prayers, around 4pm. All religious criminal cases were heard in a chamber inside the Temple. Since it was evening, after 4pm, the case against Peter and John would have to be delayed until the Temple was opened again on the next day.

4:4 *many who heard the word believed* The power of the Holy Spirit present in St. Peter as he proclaimed the truth was taken into the lives of those who heard and as many as 5,000 came to faith on that day. So now we have 3,000 brought to faith at the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) and 5,000 after the healing of the paralytic. Some scholars suggest that the numbers should be understood less as literal amounts and more for their symbolic meaning. Three is the number that symbolizes something of important in God's plan for humanities salvation while the number five is the number signifying grace and power. These scholars suggest that St. Luke's point is that those that oppose Jesus, His teachings and those that continued His mission and ministry were not the common man or woman. In fact not only were the Apostles fully engaged in the work of God's plan of salvation but God's power and grace was with them. Interesting to note that the number of five thousand was also the number recorded as being fed by Jesus in the miracle of the multiplication of loaves in Luke 9:14 as well as Matthew 14:21 and Mark 6:44

4:5-12

4:5 *their rulers and elders and scribes* This describes a formal assembly of the ruling class of the Temple, the Sanhedrin which is comprised of 71 members. The Sanhedrin would be understood as the supreme court of ancient Judaism. Remember, scribes were those men who were intense students of the law of Moses and were often called upon for information and discussion regarding issues much like lawyers in a court today. For those of you interested in history, the Sanhedrin was disbanded in 358 AD by the edict of the Byzantine Emperor and many efforts have been made by the Jewish community to revive this authority. The latest was in 2004 and sits in judgement to this day but ignored by most press.

4:6 *Annas the high priest* In the same way the Catholic Church has a Pope that sits as the head of the Church, the High Priest was the head of the Temple leadership and the Jewish nation. Anna was recorded in history as serving as High Priest from 6 AD to 15 AD but was removed from his office by Roman authority. Once a High Priest always accorded the title in the same way we

Session #4: Acts Chapter 3:1-4:22



still refer to Benedict as Pope. So, St. Luke is giving Anna the title even though he is not functioning in the role. His son-in-law Caiaphas was the High Priest of the Temple during this period, from 15 to 36AD. Scholars believe that John was probably the son of Annas and the direct successor of Caiaphas. John became High Priest in 36AD.

4:7 By what power...what name This is the Temple leadership's question. This is their concern – how did you do this? Who gave you the power? The answer: God through Jesus Christ.

4:10 whom God raised from the dead This is the very thing that got St. Peter into trouble in the first place but once again he proclaims the truth of the resurrection of Jesus! There are two types of courage – reckless courage which is one who goes into “the lions den” completely unaware of the danger and cool courage. This courage is aware of the danger but does not allow fear to be the motivator of their action. Peter understood the danger he was facing as he spoke but courageously proclaimed the truth.

4:11 stone rejected by you St. Peter is quoting from Psalm 118:22 which is a verse speaking of the Messiah. The Psalm speaks of the rejection of the Messiah. What the Temple leadership rejects in the time of Christ becomes the corner stone of a new and living Temple – the Church. St. Peter is driving home this victory of God's power by reminding the priests and scribes that their own scriptures spoke of the actions of the Temple leadership.

4:12 There is no salvation through anyone else St. Peter is in direct challenge to Roman authority and belief. For centuries the masses believed that not only was the King their ruler but he was a god as well. This was true of Rome as well. Whoever was the “Ceasar” was understood and worshipped as a god who was hailed as the people's savior and deliverer.

no other name Once again St. Peter turns to the powerful name of Jesus. SEE discussion in notes to Acts 3:6 in this session. St. Luke through a bit of word play is showing to his audience that the act of healing the paralytic is a sign of the healing nature that takes place through the act of salvation. St. Luke uses the word healed in verse 9 and saved in verse 12 which are in Greek the same word: *sozo*

4:5-12

4:5 their rulers and elders and scribes This describes a formal assembly of the ruling class of the Temple, the Sanhedrin which is comprised of 71 members. The Sanhedrin would be understood as the supreme court of ancient Judaism. Remember, scribes were those men who were intense students of the law of Moses and were often called upon for information and discussion regarding issues much like lawyers in a court today. For those of you interested in history, the Sanhedrin was disbanded in 358 AD by the edict of the Byzantine Emperor and many efforts have been made by the Jewish community to revive this authority. The latest was in 2004 and sits in judgement to this day but ignored by most press.

4:6 Annas the high priest

In the same way the Catholic Church has a Pope that sits as the head of the Church, the High Priest was the head of the Temple leadership and the Jewish nation. Anna was recorded in history as serving as High Priest from 6 AD to 15 AD but was removed from his office by Roman authority. Once a High Priest always accorded the title in the same way we still refer to Benedict as Pope. So, St. Luke is giving Anna the title even though he is not functioning in the role. His son-in-law Caiaphas was the High Priest of the Temple during this period, from 15 to 36AD. Scholars believe that John was probably the son of Annas and the direct successor of Caiaphas. John became High Priest in 36AD.

4:7 By what power...what name

This is the Temple leadership's question. This is their concern – how did you do this? Who gave you the power? The answer: God through Jesus Christ.

4:10 whom God raised from the dead

This is the very thing that got St. Peter into trouble in the first place but once again, for the third time he proclaims the truth of the resurrection of Jesus! There are two types of courage – reckless courage which is one who goes into “the lions den” completely unaware of the danger and cool courage. This courage is aware of the danger but does not allow fear to be the motivator of their action. Peter understood the danger he was facing as he spoke but courageously proclaimed the truth. This from the man whose occupation was as a fisherman and who denied Jesus three times. All God is looking for is availability not ability.

4:11 stone rejected by you

Who is the stone? Jesus. St. Peter is quoting from Psalm 118:22 which is a verse speaking of the Messiah. The Psalm speaks of the rejection of the Messiah. What the Temple leadership rejects in the time of Christ becomes the corner stone of a new and living Temple – the Church. St. Peter is driving home this victory of God's power by reminding the priests and scribes that their own scriptures spoke of the actions of the Temple leadership.

4:12 There is no salvation through anyone else

St. Peter is in direct challenge to Roman authority and belief. For centuries the masses believed that not only was the King their ruler but he was a god as well. This was true of Rome as well. Whoever was the “Caesar” was understood and worshipped as a god who was hailed as the people's savior and deliverer. Let's take a moment to reflect on the word “salvation”. We can talk of salvation as a past tense – Jesus' death and resurrection is our salvation. Our baptism is our salvation. We can talk of salvation as a future event when we think about or talk about the end of time when the salvation of God comes to all people. These are all true but as Catholics we should also understand that salvation is a process. We are saved by the free gift of God's grace. (Ephesians 2:5) But we must cooperate with the gift of grace. We must open ourselves to perceive and receive that gift of grace and that is were the process comes in. We must peel away those layers of doubt, of hopelessness of uncertainty in the power of God. (1 Peter 1:8-9; Philippians 2:12)

no other name

Once again St. Peter turns to the powerful name of Jesus. SEE discussion in notes to Acts 3:6 in this session. St. Luke through a bit of word play is showing to his audience that the act of healing the paralytic is a sign of the healing nature that takes place through the act of salvation. St. Luke uses the word healed in verse 9 and saved in verse 12 which are in Greek the same word: *sozo*

Session #4: Acts Chapter 3:1-4:22

4:13-22

4:13 uneducated

What did Peter and John do before Jesus? They were former fishermen, men of labor, not high learning. Their brave defense of the gospel caused those gathered to wonder. Peter and John may have had limited knowledge of traditional Jewish theology but in this moment it was irrelevant. The Holy Spirit had inspired them. It is often the case that those with ordinary backgrounds can find it difficult to speak in the midst of academic and/or professional arrogance. If our hearts are convicted by Christ there is a power and a dignity that no institution or organization can confer on the person. Look to the lives of the saints as examples. All too often we allow our own insecurities and uncertainties get in the way of saying and doing what we know to be right. H.G. Wells said: *The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbors sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God.*

4:16 we cannot deny it

The man healed through the power of Jesus' name was standing in their midst. This made denying what had happened as unquestionable.

4:18 charged them not to speak

In other words, the Sanhedrin slapped them on the hands and gave them a "gag order", but the Apostles could not and would not comply. *The word of the living God addressed to men obliges us more than any other human commandment or purpose.*

These are the words of St. John Paul II in a Homily given in April of 1980 on this passage.

4:20 we cannot but speak

Through the power of the Holy Spirit the apostles are compelled to offer their witness with the solid evidence that Jesus has indeed risen. Even the threats and intimidation of the Sanhedrin (4:21) cannot silence them.

4:22 For the man...was forty years old

In a surface read of this section when we come to this verse we can dismiss it as unimportant or insignificance and in truth, while there is a point to St. Luke offering this information it serves little purpose. So why did St. Luke put this little fact in? To show that this once paralyzed man was well known to those Jewish men coming and going from the Temple. One could say that the Apostles perpetrated a fraud by having someone pretend to be paralyzed but to prepare for this moment forty years earlier? Christ had not walked on the earth yet. It could also be understood that this man was tested and prepared for this moment just as the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you believe Jesus still heals today? Do you know anybody that has been healed in a miraculous way?
2. What is your name? Is there a story behind why you were given the name you have? Do you know what your name means?
3. In our discussion regarding the name of God, the name of Jesus. How seriously do you take this conversation, this teaching?

4. What do you think of civil disobedience in the name of faith such as those who are unwilling to participate in military service as conscientious objectors?
5. The Sanhedrin could not silence Peter, John and the Apostles. What is keeping you from proclaiming the salvation of God? What is silencing you?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

GOD REVEALS HIS NAME: 203-204

SYMBOLS FOR THE CHURCH/CORNOR STONE: 756

THE NAME OF JESUS: 430-35, 1507

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: 2242-43

Bibliography:

- The Catholic Study Bible NAR
- The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles by William Barclay
- The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles
- New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles by Dennis Hamm
- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Acts of the Apostles by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch
- Agape Bible Study: Gospel of Luke by Michal Hunt. Agapebiblestudy.com
- Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom by Jeff Cavins and Sarah Christmyer