

THE BEAUTIFUL MIRACLE Transcript

By Dr. Ron Jones

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Well, book of Acts is the action book of the New Testament. It's that place where the acts of the apostles are recorded, thus the name. Where we learn how the early church and the early followers of Jesus put their faith into practice or their faith into action. Dr. Luke is the human author, and he did a great job researching the history and giving a detailed record of the account of the acts of the apostles. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he penned this book. And he tells us in chapter 2, and also in chapter 4 as we mentioned last week...he gives us a little glimpse into the early church and to this early faith community. And he says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching—they were people of the Word of God and people of the Book—to the apostles' teaching and to the prayers and to the fellowship and the breaking of bread. And then Luke goes on to tell us that there were many signs and wonders that were performed by the apostles.

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Now, we don't have a record of all the miracles that were performed during the apostolic era, but we have a record of at least the first one. And it's in Acts 3. And I call it the beautiful miracle because it took place 2000 years ago at the gate Beautiful. Now, scholars are a little perplexed as to which particular gate into the temple area that was. But in the text here, it is referred to as the Beautiful Gate.

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And let me read a portion of the story beginning in chapter 3 and verse 1 so we get a sense of what's happening here. It says, "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 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. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 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!'"

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Now, as the story goes, Peter and John and were on their way to the temple at the ninth hour of the day. That's 3:00 in the afternoon by our clock and how we measure it. It was customary for the early Jews to make their way to the temple three times a day- at the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour. And reading this about Peter and John, it gives us some indication that they were still practicing Judaism. Remember, Acts is a transitional book. And it took some time for the early apostles to understand the full implications of the death, the burial, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and even the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And so it shouldn't surprise us that they kind of went back to kind of doing what they'd always been doing and what the Jews had been doing for centuries leading up to this time. They went to the temple three time a day to pray because that's where God was. And it took them some time to understand, again, the full implications of all that had happened, and to understand what you and I kind of take for granted today 2000 years later with the full canon of scripture and Paul's

letter to the Corinthians that tells us, as believers, your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit. And you can pray anywhere at any time and God is with you. Jesus came from heaven to earth and was with His disciples. That's one level of intimacy, right? But then He died and was buried. He rose again. He ascended to the Father. And He had to ascend to the Father to send the Holy Spirit, who is not just with us. He is in us, a whole deeper level of intimacy. And He is with us, and He'll never leave us and He'll never forsake us. And our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But it just took some time for them to fully understand and grasp all of that. Nothing wrong with them going to the temple three times a day, as was their habit.

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The ninth hour is also a reminder of what happened on the ninth hour of Jesus's crucifixion. As best we can tell, He was probably on the cross that fateful Friday by 9:00, the third hour of the day, all the way through the sixth hour of the day to the ninth hour of the day. And it was on the ninth hour at 3:00 p.m. where He gave up His last breath. And the Bible says He spoke His last words from the cross, a cry of victory, when He said, "It is finished." And He hung His head and gave up His spirit. Not a cry of defeat. If it were a cry of defeat, He would have said, "I am finished." But He said, "It is finished," the Father's plan, "The redemption that I was purchasing, it is finished." And so I suspect that Peter and John had some memory of that as they went to the temple at 3:00 in the afternoon at the ninth hour.

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And when they were there, they arrived at the temple at the same time that a group of friends are bringing a poor, lame beggar who had been there all his life. And he had been there for a very, very long time. He was a common person, you know, doing what beggar's do. Back in that time they would come, and they would sit outside of the temple. And they would beg for alms. They would beg for money. And we have every reason to believe that this beggar was probably there when Jesus visited the temple. But it begs this question. Why didn't Jesus heal him? Why didn't Jesus heal him? I mean, if Jesus walked into the temple and saw the same guy begging for alms, why didn't Jesus heal him? Because Jesus didn't heal everybody He came in contact with. He healed people for a specific purpose in a specific way and, oftentimes, at a specific time. And His goal was always to impact their spiritual life and their eternal destiny. But physical healing was not always His goal. And so this man was at the temple even through the time of Jesus.

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But it kind of reminds me of the guy that Jesus healed, the blind man, remember, at the pool of Bethesda in John's Gospel. And when the disciples saw this blind man, they said, "Hey, Jesus, who sinned? This man or his parents?" And Jesus said, "No, you've got your theology all wrong. It's not that somebody sinned and that's why he was born blind. He was born blind so at this time I could heal him and God would get the glory." Regardless of whether you receive your healing or when it happens, God's great events always have a timing to them. And the timing of this poor, lame beggar's healing was to bring God glory at a time when the early church needed to learn some lessons. And he's going to become a picture for us of how ministry would happen in the times of refreshing, as Peter later refers to it. The times of the apostolic era and through the church age, leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ is a picture of how

ministry would take place. And there are some lessons that we learn not only from the miracle, but also later from the message that Peter preaches.

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You see, Acts 3 contains a miracle on the front end followed by a message. It contains a wonder, a sign, followed by a word that Peter delivers. It was a sign and then a sermon. And there are some lessons to learn from the sign. There are some lessons to learn from the sermon. So let's dive into that.

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Let's read on...or actually take a look at the first lesson from the sign. And that is that we are poor, lame beggars apart from Jesus Christ. All of us are. We're poor, lame beggars. Now, if we were there that day, there might be some pity or some sympathy that rises up in us looking at this man's condition. And we feel sorry for him at some level because he is physically disabled. Ah, but be careful. You can be physically able and spiritually disabled. You can be physically disabled and spiritual abled. But even worse than being spiritually disabled, the Bible goes one step further and says apart from Jesus Christ we're not just spiritually disabled. No, we're dead in our trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2 says. And this man, if we're not careful, we'll see a physically disabled man and think of ourselves as, *I'm doing okay. I'm not physically disabled. I don't have the challenges that he had.* And yet, apart from Jesus Christ, you're still a poor, lame beggar who is dead in his trespasses and sins.

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And it's kind of a reminder to me, this story is, of the old saying that Christianity is just one poor, lame beggar telling another beggar where he can find food, all right. That's all we are. Apart from Jesus Christ we're poor, lame beggars. But we found the bread of life one day. And our job is just, as poor beggars, to tell another beggar where they find food.

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Diagnosis is always the first step to healing. That's true physically. It's also true spiritually. And the diagnosis of our spiritual condition, it's very important as we look at the pages of scripture. And through this man's life we see what is true of him physically is true of us spiritually. We are all poor, lame beggars apart from Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said His first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed are those who come to understand their spiritual bankruptcy and their spiritual disability, even their deadness in their trespasses and sins, and cry out to God for mercy. That's the first lesson we learn.

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Secondly, we are all outsiders and far from God until we come to the cross of Christ. So picture again this poor, lame beggar. He comes to the temple that day as he did every day for many, many years. And his friends sit him outside of the temple. There's no indication that he had ever been in the temple before. He was an outside, not an insider. And he sat there, strategically positioned for all the insiders who would come to the temple and the throngs of crowds of people that would pass by. And he would beg for alms, and he would be for some help, given his physical condition. But he was an outsider.

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And he reminds me a little bit of the little boy in the Christmas movie. You know, the kid who comes from the wrong side of the tracks, and he's poor. But he's standing outside of this restaurant, and he kind of does this to the window pane to look in a little bit more. And he sees all these nicely dressed people having nice conversations and eating this delicious food. But he is on the outside. He'll never get in on the inside. He's poor. He's not one of them. And that's kind of the description of who we are apart from Christ.

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In fact, the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians reminded them of who they were and their spiritual state before they met Christ. Ephesians 2:12-13, Paul says, "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you were who were once far off,"—I love this—"have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Isn't that great? Paul is writing to believers in Jesus, and he says, "Don't forget where you were. You were once outsiders, strangers, aliens, separated from God, far off, having no hope in this world. But now, by the blood of Christ you've been brought near." I mean, that's a reason to sing and dance and shout, "Hallelujah!" because of what Christ has done for us. You've not been brought near, I've not been brought near because of my good works, no. But by the blood of Christ, by the redeeming and atoning blood of Jesus Christ are we made right with God. And we go from being in darkness to light, from being outsiders to insiders. And this man, at some level, is a picture of the person who is on the outside and alienated from the promises of God.

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Third lesson we learn is that our spiritual need is greater than our physical wants. Now, he came to do what every beggar does. He came to the temple to beg for money. He thought his greatest need was physical. He was looking for a handout. But what he learned that day was his greatest need was spiritual, and he got a hand up, not a handout.

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Peter comes, and John comes to the temple that day. And I've got to give them a little bit credit because they didn't do probably what everybody else did, which was kind of walk right past them as they went into the temple, maybe flipping a coin their direction as they did. No, if you read the story carefully, they made eye contact with this guy. Now, let's just be honest with ourselves. You know, when you pull up to that interesting and there is a homeless person standing on the corner of the interesting with a sign that says, you know, "I'll work for food," or some story that they're telling there, what do we normally do? And don't lie to me. You're in church this morning, all right. We avoid eye contact, don't we? Because we've learned if you make eye contact, oh, they might come over to the car.

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I remember my first job out of college took me to New York City. And I would walk every day from my apartment through Grand Central Station to midtown Manhattan. And I had never seen this before, but I am stepping over homeless people in the middle of New York City.

And there were all these business people in suits and ties and power dresses and all this walking just right past all these homeless people, never making eye contact, not treating them like human beings. Peter and John didn't do that. I've got to give them credit. They're going to temple that day to pray, but they had enough awareness to say, "Here is a child of God created in the image of God." They make eye contact with him. And as soon as they make eye contact him, I suspect that his hopes, you know, rose up. And he thought, *I'm gonna get something today*. But look at what Peter said 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!" He didn't get a handout. He didn't get, you know, his physical need met that day, but he got a spiritual need met. He didn't get a coin tossed to him. He got eternal life. And Peter healed him and...well, let's read on to see what the reaction was.

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"And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 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." Boy, what an understatement. Filled with wonder and amazement. We would say they were blown away because here's this guy they've walked past for days, weeks, months, even years on the their way to the temple. And now he is dancing. He's leaping. There must have been something wrong with his ankles or his feet, maybe some deformity that he was born with. But now he's not just walking into the temple. He's running into the temple. He's dancing. He's leaping. He's praising God. He's creating not a small commotion, because now everybody's head is turning to this man. They all recognize him as the man who was hanging out by the Beautiful Gate.

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All of this is a reminder to me that ministry is first person and one to one before it ever becomes large scale. And even when it becomes large scale, you know, we have a little saying around here. As the church grows larger, it needs to grow smaller at the same time. And to never get so big where we look past the individual needs of people. And Peter and John are a great example of that.

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But it's also a reminder to us that the primary ministry of the church is spiritual, not physical. Some churches, some ministries have devolved into what we might call the social gospel. The social gospel is an attempt to apply Christian ethics to social issues of poverty and crime and poor nutrition and education, maybe even war and so forth, while downplaying the doctrines of salvation, heaven and hell, and the future kingdom of God. Here me when I say this...and please don't misunderstand me...but a soup kitchen will never save a soul unless you use that soup kitchen to also feed them the bread of life, to introduce them to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I've served at a lot of soup kitchens. But I'm not interested in serving at one that doesn't also introduce them to Christ. Jesus fed the 5,000, but it was a (0:19:00.0) setup to the teaching that followed, where He proclaimed, "I am the bread of life. I'm the solution to your real problem. You had hungry bellies yesterday, but, no, your real problem is you need to

feed on Me. Eat My flesh and drink My blood,” He says. The most satisfying thing is life is not what feeds the flesh but what feeds the spirit. And we need to remember that. This is a stark reminder that the social gospel is not enough and our primary purpose in ministry is to point people to their eternal hope in Jesus Christ.

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Now, all of this led to a sermon. Keep in mind that now all the heads are turning. And all the attention now is turning beyond this man to Peter and John. And the crowds are beginning to swell around Peter and John. And they’re thinking, *wow, these guys are all that.* (0:20:00.0) And Peter and John begin to resist the applause of the crowd and the allure of the crowd. Let’s pick it up in verse 11, where it says, “While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: ‘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?’”

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Now, I love what Peter is doing here, because he is deflecting the adoration of the crowd. And he kind of reminds me a little bit John the Baptist. Remember when John the Baptist came along? The crowds were pressing him and saying, “John, are you the one we’re supposed to be looking for? Are you the long-awaited Christ? John, you’re looking a lot like the Messiah these days.” And John could have gone home and looked into the mirror and said, “Well, I’m looking a little Messiah-like. Maybe I ought to run with this a little bit and see where it takes me.” But he doesn’t do that. John says, “I’m not the one.” And he compares himself to the friend of the bridegroom. He says, I’m not center stage. I’m not the one in the spotlight here. And he says of Jesus, “He must increase and I must decrease.” Now, it takes a strong core constitution of character to resist the allure of the crowd who want to give you the glory and say you’re the man or you’re the woman, and to say, no, it’s all about Christ. And Peter does this.

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It goes on to say in verse 13, he says, “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.” Now we’re fully into the word and the message. We’ve gone from the sign to the sermon. Verse 14, “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 all witnesses,” he says. “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.” I mean, if Peter had read, you know, Dale Carnegie’s book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, you know, he didn’t learn much from it. Because while he had the adoring attention of the crowd, he kind of pokes them in the eye and pokes them in the chest a few times. And he says, “You denied the servant. You delivered the Holy and Righteous One. You killed the Author of life.”

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And it brings me to the first lesson from this message, this sermon that he delivers. And that is that there is power in the name of Jesus. He attributes three names, three Messianic names from the Old Testament- servant, Holy and Righteous One, and the Author of life. You can go

into the Old Testament, and in the Messianic passages these three names are attributed to the Messiah. He says that was Jesus. He pokes them in the eye, kind of kicked them in the chest a little bit and says, “You killed him. You killed Him.”

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And then he wraps all of that up in verse 16, and he says no, this guy who was healed, you know, was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ. Do you believe in the powerful name of Jesus Christ? Do you believe there is power in the name of Jesus? I certainly hope you do. I went back this week and thought a little bit about the name of Jesus. Remember, at Bethlehem the angel of the Lord came to Joseph and said, “You shall name Him Jesus.” The name was given to Him, the name of Jesus. Later at the commissioning of the disciples, the Great Commission, Matthew 28, Jesus says, “All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The name of Jesus has all authority and is powerful. And then in Acts 4:12, Peter says, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” There is power, saving power, in the name of Jesus. And then Philippians 2, verses 9 and following, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus,”—listen to this—“every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” It’s a powerful name. Every knee will bow. Everything that can be named must bow to the name of Jesus Christ one day. And there is power in the name of Jesus Christ to break every chain, to move every mountain, to heal every disease, and to rescue every lost sinner. Let’s never forget that, friends. And the power in our ministry is to exalt the name of Jesus Christ and to point people to Him. There is power in the name of Jesus.

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Secondly, Peter goes on to say there is proof in the facts of history. In all of this, he talks about the Messianic promises. He talks about the powerful name of Jesus. He says, “You killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead.” You know, the early apostles never strayed far from the resurrection of Jesus Christ or to reminding people that they were witnesses of the event. He says, “God raised him from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” There is proof in the facts of history. The most credible defense for any witness in the 1st century in a court of law...and it’s true in our courts today...it an eye witness. If you don’t have an eye witness to what happened, what you have is circumstantial evidence. And the facts of the gospel and the credibility of Christianity is not based on circumstantial evidence. It’s based on eyewitness accounts. “I saw him with my own eyes,” the early apostle says. And they wrote it down. And we have the accounts. Why do critics attack the Bible and say it is unreliable? Well, they want to criticize and attack the eyewitness accounts. But the New Testament story and the Bible itself is highly credible because he says, “We are witnesses of this.”

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All of that to say you won’t find fairy dust and unicorns and fairy godmothers in the Bible. I was watching a news organization this past week. And the story was about how there was a group of people out there, if you can imagine this, who are not offended by some of the fairy tales that we’ve grown up with, like Little Red Riding Hood. You know, you’ve got to be kidding me. Get over yourself if you’re offended by Little Red Riding Hood. But the lady who

was defending the fairy tales we grew up, she says, “Yeah, and it’s just like some of the stories in the Bible.” And I said, oh, no, no, no. Do not compare Little Red Riding Hood to the Bible. There’s not fairy godmother. There is no fairy dust. There are no unicorns in the Bible. The Bible is based on credible witnesses. The stories you read in the Bible are made up of real people who lived in real places at real time in real history. This is what gives it credibility. But the critics want to say, “No, it’s all fairy tales. It’s fantasy. They’re fables.” No, there is power in the name of Jesus. There is proof in the facts of history and in the facts of the gospel.

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And then Peter goes on to say there is more proof in fulfilled prophecy. He goes on in verse 17. “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.” What’s he talking about? He’s talking about all the prophets in the Old Testament who spoke about the coming of Messiah. And those prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He goes on to say, “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.” Wow, what a sweeping journey through the plan and program of God from the Old Testament Messianic prophecies to what he calls the “times of refreshing,” the times of the apostolic era and even the church age in which we are in up until the time when Jesus will come again. I mean, Peter covers all of it. This is some deep theology here. And he says over and over again according to the mouths of prophets that predicted all of this.

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By the way, why is 25% of the Bible when it was written predictive and prophetic in nature? Well, in part because it’s one of the ways God adds credibility to His Word. He is a predictor of the future. And He holds Himself to a standard that says it needs to be 100% correct 100% of the time or it’s a false prophet and a false prediction. But we can have confidence in the gospel, not only because there is power in the name of Jesus and there is proof in the facts history. There is more proof in fulfilled prophecy. Peter goes on...and I don’t have time to read it all, but he mentions Moses. He mentions Samuel. All of it in the Old Testament. He is speaking to the men of Israel who knew the scriptures well. And he says, “You guys should have known this. There is no excuse here.”

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But if you go back to verse 17, he says, “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.” After Peter pokes them in the eye and kick them in the chest a little bit, he softens his rhetoric here. It may not sound like it to you, but in the Old Testament they understood sins to be willful based on knowledge of God’s law, and also sin that was not willful but based upon ignorance. Now, we say in our judicial system that ignorance of the law is no excuse. It’s the same thing when it comes to God’s law. Ignorance of God’s law is no excuse. It may mean that the consequences are different than the person who knowingly and willfully disobeys God. But he refers to them as ignorant. I’m a little perplexed on that, because he just got done telling them, “You should have known this. You know the scripture well, men of Israel. You knew the Old Testament prophecies, but somehow you missed it.” Ignorance is

when you don't know what you don't know. And it's possible that some of us here today don't know what we don't know because we've heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend. But the Bible is just full of fantasy and myth and fables. No, it's not. It's not Little Red Riding Hood. There is power in the name of Jesus. There is proof in the facts of history and the facts of the gospel. And there is more proof in fulfilled prophecy. This Bible is about real people in real places in real time in real history. But you can continue in your ignorance if you're not careful, not knowing what you don't know. It doesn't absolve guilt before a holy God. We just need to understand that. And He is calling Peter as He is calling his brothers and sisters, these men of Israel and their families, to repentance. He says in verse 19, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out."

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Peter's reference here to the times of ignorance remind me of what the apostle Paul said later in the book of Acts 17 when he made his way to Athens, that city of great Greek wisdom and understanding and knowledge. And he says to them, "The times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent." To repent. It reminds me of what Jesus said from the cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I think the scariest place to be is you don't know what you don't know. Maybe because you've never done the research yourself, and you've heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend who heard it from another liberal friend who has an agenda to try to undermine the gospel. Study it for yourself, friends. Study it for yourself. We're here 2000 years later because the resurrection of Jesus Christ happened. And if it didn't happen, smart people 2000 years ago would have discredited it then. But here we are.

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And so what's our response to all this? Well, Peter calls them to repentance. Not to a social gospel. He uses the healing of this poor, lame beggar. Well, God uses it to create a platform for the preaching of His Word and the calling of people to the cross of Christ to repent, to turn from their wicked ways, and to receive the forgiveness of their sins, the blotting out of their sins. Friends, that's why the gospel is good news. Because you're not defined by your past. Your failures are not fatal. They were taken care of at the cross of Christ. And then the penalty of our sin was paid for in full. That's the reason we can dance and leap and praise God and go into the presence of God, just like this lame beggar did, with great confidence that we are children of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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