

Healing the Lame

Hebrews chapter 6 refers to those who were given the Holy Spirit gifts as those who “have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5). And speaking of the preaching of the Gospel message, it is written: “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:4). From these passages, we learn that the Holy Spirit gifts were imparted to bear witness of the Truth that was being preached, and to give a foretaste of greater things to come.

Isaiah chapter 35 continues this theme, by describing some of the blessings of the coming kingdom: “... then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing ...” (Isa. 35:6). And again, the healing of the lame was given as a sign to John the Baptist as to the veracity of Messiah’s preaching: “... the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk ...” (Mat. 11:5).

Healing the lame then, was a means of demonstrating the power of God to save from mortal maladies. It demonstrated the nature of the apostle’s preaching to be true, and was a powerful witness supporting that work.

In the book of Acts, we have two instances where the lame were healed: the first a Jew, the second a Gentile: these were representative, we believe, of the Gospel being preached to the Jew first, and then once they had judged themselves to be unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46), to the Gentiles later. We shall consider each in turn:

THE LAME AT THE TEMPLE

Acts chapter 3 recounts the healing of a lame man who was positioned at the entrance to the Temple:

“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” (Acts 3:2-3).

But the disciples had nothing to speak of regarding this world’s goods. As Peter said: “silver and gold have I none ...” (vs 6). Paul later spoke of the Apostle’s position (1 Cor. 4:9):

“even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we suffer: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day: (1 Cor. 4:11-13).

In the circumstances of the Apostles, we have illustrated the saying: “hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Jas. 2:5).

But according to the purpose of God “if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:12). The preaching of the true Gospel was not according to the financial standing of the preacher: it was rather a conveying of spiritual food which is freely given without price:

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come. Ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:2, see verses 1-6).

The Apostles had no money, but what they did have was something far more valuable:

“Peter said, Silver and gold I have none; but such as I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 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 3:6-8).

And Peter used this opportunity to declare the greatness of the God of Abraham:

“... he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus ... and his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know ...” (Acts 3:see verses 12-19).

The fact that Yahweh is the God of Abraham proves the resurrection from the dead:

“as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mat. 22:31-32).

And here, the healing of the Jewish lame man testified to the power of Israel’s God to save, and to restore those afflicted by mortal weakness to health and vitality.

THE LAME GENTILE

Our reading for today, in Acts chapter 14 describes a second lame man being healed, this time a Gentile, in Lystra:

“... there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mothers’ womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who

steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet, And he leaped and walked” (Acts 14:8-10).

Just as the healing of the Jewish cripple testified to the greatness of Israel’s God, the healing of the Gentile at Lystra demonstrated that salvation was extended to Gentiles also, through the same God. The reaction of the people, however, was most remarkable: they went from worshipping the apostles as if they had healed the man by their own power (verses 11-13), to casting them out of the city as worthless criminals!

“When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11).

But then:

“there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (Acts 4:19).

The occasion of this stoning is referred to by the Apostle elsewhere in his catalogue of suffering for Christ’s sake (2 Cor. 11:25). Whether Paul actually was stoned to death or not is unclear, but either way, he emerged from the trial: “howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city” (vs 20), and later even returned to Lystra a second time, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (vs. 22).

TIMOTHY

The circumstances of lame being healed at Lystra appeared to have a marked effect upon Timothy, who was from Lystra. The Apostle returned there later, and the narrative continues:

“Then came he to Derby and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium ...” (Acts 16:1-2).

It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul was intimately acquainted with Timothy’s domestic situation. Later, he describes his fondness for this family:

“when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 tim. 1:5).

Again, he refers to Timothy as having been a witness to his suffering at Lystra:

“... but thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, **at Lystra**; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. 3:10-11).

It has been conjectured that the Apostle may have even stayed at Timothy’s family home whilst at Lystra: but be that as it may, he certainly knew of the strong faith of this young man. And it is likely that this was a result of seeing the sufferings and deliverances of the Apostle.

SPIRITUALLY LAME

Whilst these two occasions were to do with literally lame men being healed, there is also a spiritual sense in which men can be healed. Hebrews chapter 12 speaks of this:

“wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed ...” (Heb. 12:12-13).

Notice that here, the believers are to assist each other in their spiritual infirmities, lifting up the flagging hands, and ensuring that the lame don’t turn aside out of the way. The restoration of Israel is also described in terms of such a healing. Consider the following two passages:

“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind **and the lame ...** They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein **they shall not stumble**: for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jer. 31:8-9).

“in that day, saith Yahweh, will I assemble **her that halteth**, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make **her that halted a remnant**, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and Yahweh shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever” (Mic. 4:6-7).

When we come to consider the healing of these two lame men in the book of Acts, we see a foreshadowing of greater things to come in the future kingdom age. We see a declaration of the Power of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and an assurance of our resurrection to glory and life eternal. We must, therefore, be like Timothy who took these things to heart, and who trusted in the word spoken by Paul. And we must look to the future in hope, earnestly yearning for the kingdom to come, longing to see the fulfilment of those promises made so long ago.

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